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# Writing and Control in Hervé Guibert's *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*

Georgia Paulina Faletas

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the interplay between the themes of writing and control in two of Hervé Guibert's autofictional texts which concern his experiences with HIV/AIDS: *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*. Beginning with an examination of how Guibert establishes as its own theme the act of writing his texts, the thesis goes on to analyse the various obstacles affecting his work and to which his writing responds. These include the progression of HIV/AIDS, its impact on Guibert's body, the effect of trauma, and the taboo in writing. It argues that, faced with the unknowable situation of AIDS, and the lack of control it brings with it, Guibert centres the writing process in order to explore new challenges in his life, and that, through writing, he attempts to find a means to express the frustrations of his new reality, as well as the sense of control that is disrupted in other aspects of his life. Focusing on close readings of the two texts, this study furthermore demonstrates the way in which Guibert exploits style and structure to imbue his writing with the immediacy of his experience.

**Writing and Control in Hervé Guibert's *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and *Le Protocole compassionnel***

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Thesis submitted for the degree of MA by Research in French

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Writing’ is admittedly a vague term, and so, to swiftly define it as it will be used here, we can say that an examination of writing in Guibert’s texts encompasses the activity of writing, which is frequently referenced and sometimes narrated, and the process of creation or moulding an experience into a text. This thesis focuses on the texts *À l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie* (henceforth *À l’ami*) and *Le Protocole compassionnel*, both autofictional accounts of Guibert’s life following an HIV+ diagnosis and its development into AIDS. Beyond subject matter, the two texts are linked in their style, employing what I term self-conscious writing, which foregrounds the writing process and Guibert’s pleasures and frustrations in attempting to express the experience of life with AIDS through the written form. For Guibert, a seropositive diagnosis brings with it instability and a sense that he has little control over his life, his death or his writing. Nonetheless, writing becomes a reflective space in which he explores this lack of control; he also seeks to redress the balance of control through his ability to lend form to his experiences and assert authority in the narrative in a way that does not always extend to life outside of the pages of his books. As Anne Hunsaker Hawkins writes of illness writing, or pathographies: “the act of writing empowers the sufferer to make sense of his or her condition and to restore coherence and meaning to everyday life” (Raoul et al., 2007, 126). Guibert’s own texts show the process of attempting to achieve such control; his frustrations with and reflections on his writing form part of the narrative of both texts, reflecting that the attempt to “restore coherence” is ongoing.

Before further outlining this thesis, the decision to exclusively focus on these two texts, and not include their ‘sequel’ must be addressed. *L’Homme au chapeau rouge* is the third ‘volume’ in Guibert’s loose ‘sida’ trilogy, so its omission here may seem odd, but it is warranted. *L’Homme au chapeau rouge* certainly shares some of the same features as the previous two texts; it is an autofictional portrait of Guibert and his AIDS, and often complicates the nature

of truth, although, that is done largely through the theme of art forgeries, rather than the construction of the narrative. It follows a more traditional plot-driven structure than either of *À l'ami* or *Le Protocole compassionnel*, and, as a result, is less focused on the aspect of the writing process central to this study. Further to this, *Le Protocole compassionnel* is intrinsically linked to *À l'ami*, in a way that *L'Homme au chapeau rouge* does not approach. The publication of *À l'ami* saw great success and an increased public presence for Guibert, particularly following his appearance on the literary television discussion show *Apostrophes*, in an episode dedicated to a discussion on AIDS ("Le Sexe Homicide," 16th March 1990); his readership diversified and he became a more recognisable public figure. These are all changes that Guibert himself notes: in the paratext of *Le Protocole compassionnel*, through his dedication to those who wrote to him following *À l'ami*, and in the text itself. This increased awareness of the reader feeds into the presentation of the writing process, developing on some of the ideas explored in *À l'ami*. In comparison, *L'Homme au chapeau rouge* could more readily be taken as a standalone text.

The second issue to address is that of 'Guibert', as he will be referred to throughout this study. Hervé Guibert is obviously the author of both texts, but he is also their narrator and protagonist. There are moments when the texts play into the blurring of boundaries between fiction and truth, but in general, the reader can without difficulty accept the Guibert who is writing in the text as the Guibert who is author of that text. Although names are changed, and some episodes may differ from reality, these texts are understood as being based on Guibert's life; in interviews, such during his appearances on *Apostrophes* and *Ex-Libris* (No.84, 7th March 1991), events described in the texts, and those in his 'real life', are largely treated as one and the same. For moments when a distinction between the two offers deeper insight, it will be made, but, since author is identified with protagonist, 'Guibert' not only suffices but avoids unnecessary confusion.

This brings us to the ambiguities of 'autofiction', the genre to which I would class both texts. To explain this label and show how this generic conception will impact this thesis' analysis, a



basic foundational overview is required. If we consider, in the broadest sense, the function of terms relating to genre, we might suggest that their role is to signpost the initial expectations of someone approaching a work, from which point the question of its adherence to or subversion of that genre may take the reader in any number of directions. However, in certain cases, as with that of autofiction, a basic widely agreed upon definition may be lacking; the hybridity or ambiguity of the form means that the author's intention may be at odds with the reader's reception of it in a way that is not easily resolvable.

The origin of the term 'autofiction' can be found in Serge Doubrovsky's novel, *Fils*, where the author provides an initial definition to describe his work: "Fiction, de faits et d'événements strictement réel, si l'on veut, *autofiction*, d'avoir confié le langage de l'aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau." (Doubrovsky, 1977). For Doubrovsky, his text, which supposedly adheres to true events in the author's life, becomes fictional through the language which constructs it. Self-analysis also form part of this 'fictionalisation' of one's life; Doubrovsky argues: "Le sens d'une vie n'existe nulle part, n'existe pas. Il n'est pas à découvrir, mais à inventer, non de toutes pièces, mais de toutes traces : il est à construire. Telle est bien la « construction » analytique : *fingere* « donner forme », fiction, que le sujet s'incorpore." (Doubrovsky, 1988, 96)

Of course, all autobiographical writing has a structure; the past is reconstructed from a distance, not only of time, but of changing personality and opinions; life events are repurposed into a coherent narrative. This idea is one that critics seem to take almost for granted, as evidenced by Arnaud Schmitt's assertion of the "common-sense knowledge that every autobiography is a fiction of oneself, an a posteriori reconstruction (Gasparini 115)." (Schmitt, 2010, 127). This does not, however, eliminate the debate around what actually constitutes autofiction.

Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte Autobiographique* was published two years before *Fils*, and, as part of its categorisation of different texts, states that a work in which the name of the protagonist is the same as that of the author cannot be considered fiction: "Ce seul fait exclut

la possibilité de la fiction. Même si le récit est, historiquement, complètement faux, il sera de l'ordre de *mensonge* (qui est une catégorie « autobiographique ») et non de la fiction.” (Lejeune, 1975, 30). This is part of the pact or contract that is established between the reader and the text; the reader responds to information provided in the text itself or as part of the paratext, in order to determine what type of book they are reading. Applying the category of fiction to a text which follows the hallmarks of autobiography jars with expectations. Therefore, whilst it is into this supposedly impossible category that *Fils* places itself, the author may not have the last word in determining if this labelling is accepted, as the reader tries to figure out the ‘truth’ (Ibid.).

In contrast, Philippe Gasparini’s argument embraces ambiguity: “Ce double affichage générique ne requiert pas une lecture alternée, qui serait épuisante, mais une double lecture simultanée. [...] Loin de nuire au plaisir du texte, il est probable qu’au contraire elle l’excite.” (Gasparini, 2004, 13). However, such ambiguities may also nullify the usefulness of the term ‘autofiction’. Lejeune observed:

[L’autofiction] n’est pas un concept théorique, mais la désignation empirique et historique d’une classe de textes, désignation variable selon les locuteurs. [...] En dehors des acceptions très restrictives de Serge Doubrovsky, l’inventeur du mot, centrant sur « l’auto », et des extensions que lui a données Vincent Colonna en prenant au sérieux le sens du mot « fiction », le mot est employé aujourd’hui assez banalement pour désigner l’espace intermédiaire entre l’autobiographie et la fiction...

(Jeanelle and Vollet, 2007, 144)

Lejeune’s use of “banalement” showcases the ostensible flaw in ambiguity. There is an implication that one can use ‘autofiction’ to label any subversion from our expectations of particular genres, without engaging critically with the specific project of a particular text.

Gasparini, for instance, reads autofiction alongside the *roman autobiographique*, which suggests a focus on the fictional aspect. Vincent Colonna’s assessment of *Fils* would seem to chime with this, as he partly disputes Doubrovsky’s own assessment of his work, suggesting it is even more fictional than Doubrovsky recognises. He argues that the construction of *Fils*, whose timespan covers a single day in the life of its protagonist, but which contains reflections

and references to the past, deviates from the referential too much to be read as autobiographical. “Il est peu plausible qu'un individu se remémore autant de choses en si peu de temps. Si le lecteur accepte une telle transgression du vraisemblable, c'est parce qu'il sait qu'il ne s'agit que d'une fiction” (Colonna, 19) he concludes.

Contrastingly, whilst Schmitt recognises the same split that Lejeune observed in distinguishing Doubrovsky's and Colonna's respective focuses on “auto” and “fiction”, he is less favourable in his view of the latter approach:

The fact that the term [autofiction] is intrinsically flawed might account for Colonna and Genette's understanding of it. Indeed, they both thought that only texts in which writers fictionalized themselves deserved to be called autofiction. An imaginary character is then simply given the name of the author; nothing else has to be referential.

(Schmitt, 126)

He believes that the formation of the word ‘autofiction’ leads it to be seen as a type of fiction, which, for him, is counter to the genre's aims. Replacing the term ‘autofiction’ with ‘self-narration’, he argues, would help to clarify what the author is doing in their work. For him, self-narration is autobiographical, but it is also best described as “a loosely referential literary genre” (Ibid. 129) and “born out of the necessity to give autobiographies more sophisticated options in expressing the protean...self of the twentieth century” (Ibid.133). Unlike Gasparini, Schmitt does not consider a “double-reading” helpful or even possible, as the reader will always gravitate towards one. He suggests that the reader should replace the question of genre with: “a more urgent and pragmatic one: ‘Do I get something out of this text apart from wondering endlessly about its generic status?’ and ‘Do I get more out of it if I see it as fiction or as autobiography?’” (Ibid. 129)

What appeals about autofiction? The author Catherine Cusset sticks closely to Doubrovsky's original definition of the genre, as it is the one which applies most fully to her own writing (Cusset, 2007, footnote 5), and sees autofiction as a “truth project” (Cusset, 2012, 10). Re-ordering events or excluding irrelevant life anecdotes is often necessary to reach the truth, in

keeping with Doubrovsky's ideas about the fiction residing in the language which gives form to one's life. Cusset presents the idea of an autofiction "not centred on the self, but erasing the self so as to make the truth of past emotions emerge" (Ibid. 2); the "self" referred to being a superficial 'social' self, which masks true identity. For Cusset, the truth which she prioritises in her autofiction is not merely based on the referential, but is one that necessitates an exposure of hitherto obscured aspects of the self.

Such exposure might not necessarily demand the vulnerability it initially suggest. The author has the power to say as much or little as they like, and the ambiguity of autofiction can facilitate this well. Edmund White views the convergence of disparate literary forms as a boon to the author of autofiction:

The form itself, which is neither purely fact nor fiction, gives the writer both the prestige of confession (this is my story, only I have the right to tell it, and no one can challenge my authority in this domain), and the total freedom of imaginative invention (I'm a novelist, I can say whatever I please, and you can't hold me responsible for the opinions expressed by my characters, not even by my narrator).

(White, 1995)

This may certainly be the view of a reader confronted with a work in which, for instance, a written event is contradicted by external information. A specific example of this could be the question of whether Guibert attempted suicide with his stock of the heart medication Digitaline. Ross Chambers notes how the scene filmed in *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur* contradicts Guibert's claim in *Le Protocole compassionnel* that he had not taken the camera nor the Digitaline with him on that particular trip to Elba (Chambers, 1997). Further to this, in his diaries, bound up under the title *Le Mausolée des amants*, Guibert describes how he filmed a faked suicide attempt with his Digitaline (MAU 532). Whilst *La Pudeur où l'impudeur* and *Le Mausolée des amants* were released posthumously, Guibert would have been aware of his omission in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, and, in any case, a reader (or viewer) approaching these works at the present time will not be able to ignore these deliberate contradictions and how the truth of one source denies the truth of another. However the reader chooses to interpret the texts, whether, like Shmitt, they find their reading experience enhanced by their knowledge

of the author's life or disregard it completely, one can see that the ambiguity can serve to strengthen the author's control over their text.

Beyond the truth of the writer's own life, a writer of autofiction is often also writing about other people. Cusset discusses Doubrovsky's own experience with writing about his wife Ilse, who died, possibly of suicide, possibly by accident, but the cause of which some attributed to her reading what he had written about her; this included journalist and interviewer Bernard Pivot, whom she quotes as asking "How does one feel after killing one's wife?" (Cusset, 2012, 12). Doubrovsky wrote of this experience himself, defending his position and concluding:

...ce ne sont pas des lois, d'ailleurs opposées, « Liberté d'expression » et « atteinte à la vie privée », qui régleront le problème insoluble de savoir jusqu'où peut aller l'autofiction. Seul, l'écrivain et le juge peuvent, en leur âme et conscience, et chacun de son côté, décider de ses limites. Les avocats, eux, plaideront le pour et le contre, comme toujours, selon leur client.

(Doubrovsky, 2013<sup>1</sup>)

Unsurprisingly, the writer does not always have the final say. An account of official censorship can be found in Camille Lauren's "(Se) dire et (s')interdire" (Jeanelle and Vollet, 2007, 221-228): Laurens was involved in a legal battle which ended with her changing the name of the doctor in the book she wrote about the loss of her baby, *Philippe*, demonstrating that potential damage to the reputation of the person written about can be wielded as a suppressive tool, regardless of the artistic argument for full expression.

For Guibert, at least, the ethical debate inclines more towards taste rather than legality. Like Doubrovsky, he was questioned by Pivot about his own autofiction (*Apostrophes*, 1990), this time concerning whether Guibert had a right to write about Michel Foucault's death from AIDS. Guibert was somewhat ambivalent in defending himself, although he highlighted the value of truth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [autofiction.org/index.php?post/2013/05/23/Serge-Doubrovsky](http://autofiction.org/index.php?post/2013/05/23/Serge-Doubrovsky)

<sup>2</sup> See 'The Unsayable'

The question of truth brings us to the status of *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*. Both these works are published as novels, but both are highly referential. This alone could place the texts in the loosest categorisation of autofiction, as works that seems to be two things at once, but there are further elements of what one might consider Guibert's writing project which support this initial placement. Similarly to Doubrovsky's conception of autofiction as a means of uncovering the truth of oneself, there is a searching quality to Guibert's writing, focusing as he so often does on the process of the text's construction. As well as the previously mentioned example of contradiction in his work, there is also the fact that he is a particularly strong presence as a writer in, and the writer of, his own work. His presence as author is frequently apparent in the texts, which can blur the lines between the referential and fictional, as it reminds the reader of the artificial nature of a narrative; Guibert is constructing what we are reading.

Jean-Pierre Boulé favours the term "roman faux" for Guibert's writing. The main principle behind this is that, unlike Doubrovsky for instance, Guibert does more in his writing to pervert truth than to be scrupulously accurate: "chez Guibert, c'est le fait qu'il ne cherche pas à dire la vérité, à vérifier lieux et dates, mais bien à les maquiller. À la limite, si pacte il y a dans ces livres, c'est un « pacte de leurre »,» (Boulé, 2011). Boulé's argument is well-reasoned, although the term autofiction does not contradict it. In fact, the ambiguity of the genre, which some may view as a hindrance to attaining a proper definition, is a quality which is very much matched by Guibert's writing, and therefore an effective lens through which to examine it.

The mode of autofiction suggests the process of making sense of one's life, and includes a deliberate structuring of it through writing as well as the element of control flagged up by White. Discussion of Guibert's writing practice, as narrator and author, bleeds into some of the aspects that the debate around autofiction produces, because his texts are heavily focused on the process of creating and structuring narratives. Moreover, autofiction's perceived blurring of fact and fiction and the increased scrutiny this might instil in readers, lends itself to the theme of control, as White suggested; the times when Guibert explicitly plays with truth,

or his divulging of personal information about an easily identifiable Foucault, might be seen as assertions of his authority—he can say what he wants to.

Such considerations provide a foundational base for the exploration of writing and control in Guibert's texts. Building on this, the first chapter looks at how Guibert establishes the writing process as central to his work, through the use of what I name 'self-conscious' techniques, that remind the reader of the constructed nature of the text and foreground the immediacy of the creative process. Guibert's heavy focus on the writing process includes the ways in which this is hindered following his seropositive diagnosis, some of which are addressed in this chapter. The second chapter looks at the body with AIDS in relation to writing; the ways in which the ill, tired or weakened body can act as a practical barrier to the activity of writing. It also looks at how Guibert explores and addresses in writing his changing relationship to his body, as well as the effect of external perceptions that would make it into a spectacle. The third chapter turns to the limits of the written form: the 'unsayable' encompasses the question of what *should* not be said, according to morality, as well as what *cannot* be said, that is one's struggle or inability to broach certain topics, in this case due to trauma. These are aspects that can overwhelm Guibert's attempts at writing, and as such, this thesis will explore how the texts engage with them, and whether Guibert is able to reconfigure a sense of control through his writing.

## SELF-CONSCIOUS WRITING

Whereas we might refer to a narrator when discussing a text, the way that Guibert fashions *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and *Le Protocole compassionnel* frequently reminds us of Guibert's presence as their writer. It is a writing that I dub as 'self-conscious' because it is self-reflective and self-referential to a degree that makes writing its own theme: Guibert talks about writing, narrates his process of writing, and reminds us that we are reading a constructed text, all of which brings the reading process in closer proximity to the writing process. This chapter separates the pattern of self-conscious writing into the categories of time and style. In both texts, the time of narration, that is, the point in time from which Guibert narrates events, is constantly shifting; there are multiple passages in which Guibert references the fact that he is 'currently' writing, but these passages do not share the same writing 'present', thus bearing some resemblance to diary writing. Reflections on Guibert's writing style infringe and at times take over the narrative of certain passages. Due to this conspicuous treatment of time and style, some sections of the text might be said to conjure an image of individual writing sessions, where Guibert reflects on a particular event or time. These techniques often emerge at points in the text when Guibert feels a lack of control over his situation, but they also keenly demonstrate a narrator's power to disrupt textual expectations and control what the reader can access. This chapter seeks to clarify how this balance functions at a very basic textual level, which will be the basis for further exploration of other themes in subsequent chapters.

### Time

The chronology of *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel* is largely non-linear. Although both texts contain clusters of passages which chart a certain period of time sequentially, such as Muzil's hospitalisation, this pattern is not sustained, and a passage of analepsis or prolepsis is just as likely to follow as one which progresses from the events of the previous section. The fact of these being numbered in *À l'ami*, which a reader may be conditioned to view as a



delineation of one hundred marked ‘chapters’, does not make the narrative any more ordered than *Le Protocole compassionnel* in terms of chronology. Following Gérard Genette’s categories of narration in terms of temporality, we can say that much of both texts consists of subsequent narration of events. The distance between action and narration varies, however, and there are certain passages which, like diaries, employ a “simultaneous reporting of thoughts and feelings” (Genette, 1980, 217) alongside subsequent narration, and which therefore give the impression of using writing to ‘figure out’ what one thinks and feels about situations in the moment; as we will see, an undercurrent of many of these diary-like passages is uncertainty. The first section of this chapter will examine the function and effect of passages which use features such as deictic markers to highlight the fact that Guibert is writing from a specific ‘present’ context. Such passages often accompany or result in a disruption of chronology which can demonstrate dramatic shifts in Guibert’s attitudes or circumstances; this section argues that out of the seemingly uncontrolled chaos emerge controlled and deliberate narrative choices.

*À l’ami* covers Guibert’s life with HIV/AIDS following his initial diagnosis. It also delves into a period prior to this, recounting the illness and death of his friend Muzil from, as Guibert came to find out, AIDS. The text’s non-chronological structure allows for past and present events to inform each other through their significance or emotional resonance, as when Guibert views his and Muzil’s mortality in tandem. Alongside his daily life, runs a basic plot concerning his friend Bill, who works for pharmaceutical company and promises to treat Guibert with a newly developed vaccine. The prospect of this miracle cure is the basis for *À l’ami*’s opening passage and remains significant to the emotional trajectory of the text, as Guibert comes to realise his friend will not, in fact, save his life.

A number of the passages which are written from a present position in *À l’ami* describe events from a similar period of time, that of Guibert awaiting test results on his T-cell count<sup>3</sup>, which

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<sup>3</sup> T cells, or CD4 cells, are white blood cells crucial in fighting off infections and illness, and which the HIV virus destroys.

will determine if he needs to go on the antiretroviral drug AZT. For Guibert, this would mark a new phase of his illness, which, at the time of writing, is to a great extent viewed as a point of no return in terms of recovery: a T-cell count of 200 or less is one metric by which AIDS (as opposed to HIV) is defined, and, in the text, a T-cell count of under 300 would make Guibert ineligible for the potential cure of Melvil Mockney's AIDS vaccine, a fictional counterpart to the vaccine worked on by Jonas Salk and Kevin Kimberlin<sup>4</sup>. The present tense narration in these passages reflects the tension resulting from Guibert's uncertainty as to the outcome of a fairly literal life or death situation, even if, as with the first passage examined here, the first-time reader does not have access to the full implications of what is at stake.

The first three sections of the text, and Section 2 in particular, communicate a wealth of information, hardly any of which is contextualised in a way that the reader may appreciate its full implications. However unlikely a miracle cure for AIDS may seem, it is introduced with the confidence of a short declarative statement in the opening sentence of *À l'ami*: "J'ai eu le sida pendant trois mois." (AMI 9). In contrast, the second passage (10-11) of the text consists of two long, subordinate clause laden sentences, which upend the reader's already limited understanding of what is going on. The narrative shifts to the 'present' moment, here 26<sup>th</sup> December 1988, many months, as he tells us, after he had heard about this potential cure. Guibert is plunged into uncertainty as to whether to believe in salvation or to give in to despair, and has isolated himself in Italy with his writing. The shift to a present tense narration reflects both his anxieties and his use of writing as an outlet through which to express them; indeed, Guibert will go on to describe his book as "un compagnon" (12). Many details will be unclear to the reader. The long sentences may indeed be one of them, as, later on in the text, Guibert explicitly references the influence of the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard's writing style on his own (172, 230-233). In Section 3, Guibert refers only to "T.B." who has smuggled himself or itself in his suitcase and due to whom he says "Je me suis arrêté de le lire pour stopper l'empoisonnement." (11). Even if one makes the connection that T.B. must therefore be an

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<sup>4</sup> Guibert refers to the Salk vaccine by name in his diaries. (MAU 509, 520)

author or book, it is not clear that this poisoning is a reference to the influence on his writing; it is only later on in the text that that connection can be retrospectively added to the reader's understanding of these earlier sections. At this stage in the narrative, therefore, which comes just before even that oblique allusion to Bernhard on the following page, the syntax, combined with the present tense, is suggestive of racing thoughts, or of someone writing without knowing how the sentence will end. This sense is confirmed, when, in the second sentence, Guibert unequivocally states of the book he is writing "j'en ignore le déroulement de bout en bout, je peux en imaginer plusieurs fins," (10). The reader is thrust into a moment of the creation of a text whose reach will extend into the unknown future in addition to the past events he recounts; Guibert is unaware of what he will write as he is unaware too of the outcome of his situation.

The reader possesses only a partial understanding of what is motivating Guibert to start writing this passage, and indeed his book. The date provided earlier, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1988, means little at this stage; even the knowledge, as mentioned earlier, that this passage is written months after the time that the opening of the book takes place, does not add much: the reader can surmise that Guibert has not (yet) had access to the cure he mentioned, but little else. It is not until later passages that the reader will learn of the dates 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1988, and 11<sup>th</sup> January 1989: respectively, the date he undergoes blood tests, and the date he awaits for the results. It is only when looking back with this knowledge that the reader is able to comprehend the uncertainty illustrated here as a specific concern relating to whether Guibert's condition has significantly worsened; whilst this falls under the broader element of fear and uncertainty surrounding HIV/AIDS, which is what the first-time reader may presume this passage to be about, its specificity is important to Guibert's circumstances and to the narrative, as it marks a significant shift in his life. In which case, we may ask why its full meaning is so gradually unravelled.

To begin to answer this requires an initial recourse to the text as a whole. Guibert, in the narrative, begins writing his text at this point (Section 2), but it is not used as the narrative's

opening passage, nor does it define the rest of the text. Stylistically, not all passages consist of long sentences or present tense, and in terms of chronology, this ‘present’ is but one moment which Guibert will move on from both into the past and, as we will see, with future ‘present’ moments from which he writes. The narrative is not consistent, in structure or style. One could argue that the construction of *À l’ami* (and *Le protocole compassionnel*) favours an emotional coherence over a chronologically ‘faithful’ recounting. This approaches Cusset’s conception of autofiction as “not centred on the self, but erasing the self so as to make the truth of past emotions emerge” (Cusset, 2), in which the ‘self’ is to be understood as “the fiction of a unified self” (Sherwin, 2011, 10) common to life writing, which requires post-rationalisation of one’s life into a narrative; instead, Guibert focuses on the immediacy of his emotions. The reader’s lack of knowledge as to what is happening in the narrative parallels Guibert’s own lack of knowledge as to his fate, as well as the volatility of his emotions, which ricochet between hope and despair; an absence of specific context helps to bolster the uncertainty which is plainly described in the passage. The reader does not know exactly what it is they do not know: they are aware that they do not have the full context of why Guibert has isolated himself in Rome, but they cannot yet access that context. HIV/AIDS is sufficiently life-altering and life-threatening that a reader does not ‘need’ the shock of the greater closeness to death signalled by AZT in order to feel the urgency of the passage. In this way they are able to view it not in terms of test results but of the broader existential threat of HIV/AIDS. Withholding information also intertwines with the theme of writing. The set-up of this passage is that Guibert begins his book in limbo, having fled from his friends to isolation in Rome, all of which conveys a fear of the unknown, but its conclusion suggests that there is value in this uncertainty: “je me dis que ce livre n’a sa raison d’être que dans cette frange d’incertitude, qui est commune à tous les malades du monde.” (11). The statement is, fittingly, perhaps less overtly positive than it is ambivalent, but in the context of this scene, it establishes uncertainty as a source of creation in its own right; Guibert’s visions of a multitude of endings for his book is not a failure on his part, but reflects the tension of uncertainty, which allows for a narrative faithful to the immediacy of Guibert’s particular experience. The evocation of “tous

les malades” might remind us of the larger context of pathographical writing. The focus on uncertainty can be read in line with Arthur Frank’s conception of the ‘chaos narrative’, in which an individual is writing from within the space of an ongoing illness, hence “lived chaos makes reflection, and consequently storytelling, impossible” (Frank, 1995, 98). The “anti-narrative” that Frank argues results from the impossibility of reflection is not, however, reflective of *À l’ami* as a whole; rather, Guibert incorporates such passages as more chaotic irruptions within the text, so that the text as a whole still manages to maintain this same spirit of uncertainty through a narrative structure that returns to such points of deictic immediacy, without being incoherent.

The narrative does not return to the period of time between 22<sup>nd</sup> December and 11<sup>th</sup> January, nor develop an explanation of the full context of this initial passage until Section 18 (51-60). However, the explanation given in this section, which is written a week before his test results are due, is no less disorientating to the reader than Section 2 was. This is partly due to what we might, following later revelations, deem the ‘Bernhardian’ syntax of the opening sentence, which spans three pages and whose chronology pinballs the reader between several dates within the space of the first few lines. Analysis of Bernhard’s prose and theatre work often focuses on his grandly expansive syntax. Martin Esslin describes how, in his works, “a phrase...is stated, inverted, varied, repeated and then repeated again in its inverted form” (Esslin, 1980, 374). Gitta Honegger, in her exploration of the translation of Bernhard, calculates the specific dimensions of such sentences: “In German, the opening sentence [of *Beton*] consists of 197 words. The English version cuts this breathless overture into three sentences and a total of 237 words.” (Konzett, 2002, 170). She further demonstrates the “performative element of Bernhard’s language that is so characteristic even of his prose texts” (Ibid. 171), and the challenge in conveying in translation the subtleties of characterisation emerging from specific lexical and syntactical choices. Guibert’s imitations retain this characteristic, as his use of the ‘Bernhardian’ style communicates his state of mind.

As outlined earlier, the influence of Thomas Bernhard is not addressed until a later point in the text, and so the impression made during an initial reading is that the syntax represents panic. Panic, felt both in the moment of writing his experience (from a point only a week away from the publication of his test results), and during the initial expedition to the hospital in order to undergo those tests. All in a rush, as if Guibert is purging himself of the anxiety of this whole period of time, the opening section of the first sentence outlines some basic points:

Aujourd’hui, 4 janvier 89, je me dis qu’il ne me reste exactement que sept jours pour retracer l’histoire de ma maladie [...] car je dois appeler le 11 janvier dans l’après-midi le docteur Chandi pour qu’il mette au fait par téléphone des analyses auxquelles j’ai dû me soumettre le 22 décembre, pour la première fois à l’hôpital Claude-Bernard, entrant par là dans une nouvelle phase de la maladie... (51)

This delineates the period 22<sup>nd</sup> December-11<sup>th</sup> January, into which a reader can now situate Section 2 (26<sup>th</sup> December), thus comprehending it in that context. Even as the specificity underlying both Sections 2 and 18 begins to come into focus, the descriptor “nouvelle phase de ma maladie” remains somewhat vague. This vagueness can partly be accounted for by Guibert’s reluctance to voice his situation, suggested a few lines further down, where he describes Chandi booking the appointment for him: “le docteur Chandi...avait épilé au telephone mon nom, mon adresse et ma date de naissance, me propulsant par là publiquement dans une nouvelle phase avouée de la maladie.” (Ibid.). The choice of “publiquement” and “avouée” indicate the almost superstitious power of the unsaid. Guibert’s personal details are still bound within the medical sphere, but relating them to another party moves him into an arena outside of the perhaps more manageable privacy of Chandi’s practice. The initial test Guibert takes to determine his seropositivity is narrated about a hundred pages after this section, but there is a relevant point of comparison between that anonymous test (155), where Jules and Guibert’s samples and test results are identified by a number, and the personalised patient file he has now built up; “publiquement” corresponds to the creation of that medical identity which, as Guibert’s illness progresses, can be passed on to different doctors and hospitals. It can be seen as an official, binding confirmation of the progression of his illness. The contrast between “une nouvelle phase” and “une nouvelle phase avouée” similarly marks

the power of acknowledging what one may already have known; Guibert's delay in stating in the narrative what precisely this new phase entails reflects a similar comfort in denial, a comfort which can be made unstable simply through the fear that 'saying makes it so'. Whilst he cannot yet name it, however, the repetition of "nouvelle phase" indicates his fixation on the idea; he cannot hide from it.

Guibert begins to recount the journey he took to the hospital for the blood tests, amidst the disruption of a general strike, but this narrative is continuously interrupted with proleptic descriptions of the procedure itself, so that subordinate or parenthetical clauses become over-inflated as he adds more and more detail, including copious blood imagery, before returning back to a description of that initial commute, reorienting himself with "...mais auparavant"(52) and "...mais pour l'instant" (53). This device simultaneously expresses the stress surrounding his attempts to reach the hospital, and the trauma of the experience which keeps overtaking his narrative as he attempts to recount it on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January. Or, indeed, 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, as he reveals his actual 'present' to be: "écrivant tout cela en réalité le 3 janvier au soir par peur de m'écrouler dans la nuit" (52). The reader's concept of time in the passage is once more thrown off balance, and Guibert's panic or trauma returns to the fore; as with the writing Guibert, we are confronted with a wall of different stressful experiences simultaneously.

This first sentence (51-54) comes to a close when Guibert returns to the metro after failing to procure a taxi. Subsequent sentences do not rival the length of this initial one, but there are still several similarly labyrinthine sentences leading up to the blood tests, at which point (around page 58) the sentence to sentence syntax becomes more consistent, until the end of the passage where we return to Guibert's uncertainty as to his results, and the sentences begin to grow alongside it. Amidst the disorientation conveyed, clarity emerges about what this new phase of Guibert's illness entails:

une nouvelle prise de sang à la recherche de l'antigène P24, qui est le signe de la présence offensive et non plus latente du virus dans le corps, cela afin de mettre en branle la démarche administrative permettant d'obtenir de l'AZT, qui est à ce jour le

seul traitement du sida en phase définitive : « Maintenant, si l'on ne fait rien, ce n'est plus une question d'années, mais de mois. »

(55-56)

The information is presented with scientific, matter-of-fact succinctness, distanced from emotion. The medical description furthermore delays the arrival of the final utterance, spoken by Chandi, and which Guibert's phone conversation with him that morning recalled (55). There is a further contrast between direct and reported speech. The factual description of the presence of the p24 antigen and the status of the HIV virus in the body is not 'traditional' reported speech, in the sense that he has not framed it as specifically quoting Chandi; it is, however, the language and explanation of the medical institution, thus Guibert's description is that of a patient who has taken on and then speaks in the language of the information he has received. Direct speech coming after this could therefore represent an idea that Guibert has not quite accepted, although the seeming definitive nature of the declarative statement rings through him like an omen. Once Guibert arrives at his appointment, the purpose of his visit is mentioned again, we learn too that he has been under observation for a year (58). This alerts the reader to the time that the narrative has yet to cover. More information that is given to us in incomplete form includes the time after his appointment when Guibert consults Bill on the phone about the process of obtaining AZT (60). The reader knows that Bill works in the pharmaceutical industry (21), but the significance of his character in the text and the impact of his betrayal have not yet been fully formed; what may read as a throwaway line about consulting an expert can be compared to a passage much later on in the text, in which a similar conversation with Bill is the guise for a desperate plea: "je feignis de le consulter sur la posologie, ce qui était bien sûr une façon de le supplier : tire-moi de là, fais quelque chose pour moi," (244). Looking back, Guibert may be attempting the same thing here. At this stage (Section 18), there are still many things the text has yet to reveal.

Behind the content of the passage is the writing project. The fact that Guibert is physically writing these lines should be central to our interpretation of them, as he is recounting his experience through a specific 'present' moment, reflecting both on the past event and his



current writing up of it. The passage represents the tension between needing to write and struggling to: the delay in naming AZT and the diversions in this narrative were all illustrations of this. Guibert talks about feeling the need to rid himself of the experience right after his appointment (59), an idea we will encounter throughout both texts; writing is one way of purging negative experiences. Writing can also represent life. Guibert has told Chandi of the choice he sees between writing and suicide, and so his proclamation at the end of the passage that his results “risque de menacer ce livre,” (60) becomes charged. There are a couple of ways to understand this statement. His results will likely reveal that he is in the final phase of his illness, during which death by AIDS or by his own hand will put an end to his writing. “Menacer” is also a development from the “frange d’incertitude” proffered in Section 2. The book is threatened because there will be no uncertainty; his dreaded results will signal irrevocable change that will affect his writing, whether through rendering what he has written thus far irrelevant, or causing him to cease to write at all.

In Section 23 the narrating ‘present’ has shifted to 11<sup>th</sup> January and Guibert states that he has not been working on this book, although we learn that he has been correcting a different manuscript; writing is still part of his life, but his ability to write about his present circumstances is already affected by his expected results. The narrative structure of the text reflects this somewhat, as there is a shorter gap between this and the previous AZT passage, with little progression in narrative action in between. The passage begins with another long sentence, covering the wait for his results that he does not receive when he rings up the busy doctor Chandi (71-72). The uncertainty of the previous passages is still there, but there is a greater sense that this was a form of denial, and he openly speaks of this desire to fool himself. Now he is back to a point of complicated uncertainty as he anxiously awaits the verdict: “je me retrouve entièrement ignorant de ce que je sais déjà” (71). The unknowability of AIDS and the death it almost invariably led to at that time, somewhat complicate this denial, since it is true that Guibert is somewhat ignorant of what his results will mean for him, even if he knows what those results are likely to be. The rest of the passage recounts the past few days, and the

struggle between his desire to write and his fear is once more highlighted. AIDS is spurring him on to write all manner of books, as the awareness of his mortality overtakes any anxiety about the quality of his work. At the same time however, the wait has rendered him incapable of returning to this book until now (73-74). Notably, the reader is left in this limbo alongside the Guibert of 11<sup>th</sup> January, who does not receive his results. The next two passages focus on the painting he undertakes instead of writing and, after that, the narrative turns to Marine, and thus the action of the text continues in the past, and the reader, like Guibert, who was expecting a verdict, is left unsatisfied. We do not find out his results until page 214, and there is a follow-up passage written on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1989, in which Guibert outlines more specific figures, as he recounts the results that Chandi ended up giving him on 12<sup>th</sup> January (232); in Section 76, a comment, almost a side note: “mais à ce jour, 20 mars, où j’achève la mise au propre de ce livre, je n’ai toujours pas avalé la moindre gélule d’AZT” (239), leaves the issue of AZT ultimately unresolved within *À l’ami*. We see then, that the results only arrive in the narrative after Muzil’s death and after the introduction of the vaccine plot; there is no further prolepsis to this point, as instead Guibert waits for the action of the text to catch up. The postponement of the eventual reveal allows for it to be received at a point where the reader can comprehend the full emotional impact of what being on AZT means for Guibert, which includes the trauma of Muzil’s AIDS-related death and Bill’s betrayal. It furthermore allows these earlier passages to maintain the uncertainty and chaos that bore them.

The AZT saga is particularly noteworthy because the passages revisit a specific question, but there are a couple of other passages whose narratives are deictic or in the present tense, and which project a similar uncertainty. These occur in the latter half of the text, with the first beginning in a moment of inaction, “J’hésite à me fabriquer cette fausse prescription” (234), referring to the false prescription he then uses to obtain the heart medication Digitaline. Guibert sees suicide as the only true “contrepoison” against AIDS, but as with any death, one’s control and knowledge of what will happen is limited. In fact, Guibert worries it may not be a fully deliberate act, and that simply having access to the means of suicide, will lead to him

overdosing without proper reflection. This suggests that even the illusion of control procured by suicide is out of his reach, as he cannot imagine himself able to resist. Whatever form it takes, death is currently unknown to him: the passage proliferates with questions in the conditional tense as he imagines what would happen after ingesting the Digitaline, from his actions (“Je m’étendrais sur le lit ? Je débrancherais le téléphone ? Je passerais de la musique ? Quelle musique ?”) to his thoughts (“A quoi penserais-je ? À qui?”) (234). This is not a particularly sentimental project, but reflects more an inability to comprehend death. A certain degree of humour can be derived from Guibert getting caught up in details, or from his presentation of waiting for death to come, attempting to fill in the time with music or masturbation. A darker humour comes from the sense that any action or thought becomes superfluous or absurd against the significance of death. The question: “Est-ce que je ne viens pas de faire une grosse bêtise ?” (235) might, for a second, fool our expectations of a renouncement of suicide, reflecting either the last thought of his imagined self or one that abruptly interrupts his present daydream. However, the subsequent question “Est-ce que je n’aurais pas mieux fait de me pendre ?” is grimly anticlimactic, as Guibert’s second thoughts are to criticise technique rather than intent. The question of whether he should kill himself at all does follow on, but the delay has prevented the passage from becoming reduced to a ‘simple’ “To be or not to be”. For Guibert, turning away from suicide is not choosing life, but the “fausse mort naturelle” of AIDS; his death will not be free from the grotesque. A false natural death is an apt description for a terminally ill individual’s outlook on the development of their illness; particularly for a newly discovered condition for which there are inadequate treatment options. The body is left to destroy itself, as researchers struggle to find medication to prevent this; thus it is perhaps no less desperate and no more shockingly unnatural a death than his suicide might have been. Unsurprisingly, based on what has been examined thus far, the passage ends with recourse to writing (and painting); but creating is not salvation, it becomes his existence until pushed to a point of madness, cut off by death (235).

Writing is central to Guibert's life, but the ambivalent to negative framing of it occurs again at the end of the book. "La mise en abyme de mon livre se referme sur moi." (284) suggests that writing perpetuates his entrapment rather than allowing him to transcend his situation, and the message we are left with is one of despair. After *À l'ami* Guibert claimed he had stopped writing (*Apostrophes*, 1990), which corresponds to this ending note, but in the sole context of this text, we are left only with a dying body, weak and helpless as a child ("mes jambes et mes bras d'enfant"). The invocation of a child communicates vulnerability through both symbol and the reality of a body wasting away to resemble that of a child. In a reversal of birth and life, this regressions marks a return to a point of oblivion, this time through a rapidly approaching death. The present tense in this passage means that the book is cut off at another 'present' point of writing, suggesting that he is writing 'to the very end', reflecting the previously imagined writing to the point of madness. Throughout these passages, the use of deixis which centres the writing process remains in the domain of uncertainty and illustrates the ongoing nature of Guibert's writing project. Writing becomes associated with life, but not salvation, and so it reflects the chaos and uncertainty of Guibert's existence.

*Le Protocole compassionnel* adopts a similar, non-chronological, reflective style to *À l'ami*, although its action concerns a narrower period of time. It similarly opens with an emotionally significant turning point; instead of a vaccine, it is Guibert's illegal acquisition of the anti-retroviral drug DDI, left over by a dancer who died from AIDS. It is a chronicle of Guibert's daily life as his condition deteriorates, interspersed with moments of hope or improvement.

The use of deixis and present tense in *Le Protocole compassionnel* does not possess the same frantic urgency as many of the passages in *À l'ami*. One reason for this is that the events in *Le Protocole compassionnel* are a lot closer to the time of narrating than they are in much of *À l'ami*, making the switch to present tense less jarring. The entirety *Le Protocole compassionnel* also sees Guibert at the advanced stage of AIDS that *À l'ami* began to establish. His daily life

is framed by death, and it is from this context that the urgency of these passages arises: deixis is not just used to describe life-changing events, as in *À l'ami*, but also everyday occurrences.

Thus, early on in the text, the first deictic adverbial marker, “l’autre jour” is to introduce a passage in which he falls over in a café (PC 15). This incident reflects a new reality for Guibert, in terms, firstly, of his increasingly debilitating condition, and secondly in the shift in the attitudes, or more accurately in Guibert’s expectations of the attitudes of, the world around him; to Guibert’s surprise, the waiter rushes to his assistance. The prejudice he has harboured against the staff, including his assumption of enmity they hold against him is disproven by the way in which they help him, “si spontanément et si délicatement” (15). His frailty gives him access to interactions and an intimacy with others previously unavailable. This scene serves as a jumping-off point for the rest of the passage to consider his body in other contexts, including his inability to get up from a massage couch, and comparisons of his body to that of an elderly person and of a concentration camp survivor; the implications of the latter image, which conveys an existence as defined by extreme trauma and proximity to death, will more thoroughly be explored in the next chapter. Imagery of death is revisited in another deictic passage, which begins with a proposition from Jules to photograph Guibert’s “squelette”, which Guibert verifies to mean not his bones, but his body as it is now, his “squelette vivant” (31). Much later on in the text, Guibert once more begins with a present tense positioning which he then uses to muse more generally on the state of his body. In this case, the premature aging of his body is illustrated with comparisons to the decrepitude of his great aunt Suzanne (160-161). Unlike the panic conveyed through the AZT passages in *À l'ami*, here the lack of control is a daily burden, embedded in the body itself.

Another daily reality is seen in Guibert’s numerous medical appointments and examinations. Of the four passages that employ recent or present deictic markers, three of these establish their timeframe as “ce matin”, (54,121, 250) as if to replicate the activity of diary writing; the fourth is the last passage in the book (257-261), and uses a mix of present, past imperfect and perfect tense, but is largely concerned with events of the day of writing. The close proximity

of the narration to the time of the action described demonstrates the large role that these appointments have in his life, as he feels the need to immediately write about them. These passages are spread throughout the text and, although we are able to fix them into *Le Protocole compassionnel*'s general timeline through their references to other events, this precision is not essential, because no matter what is going on in Guibert's life, the reader recognises these passages as the return to the humdrum of regular check-ups. The repetition of "ce matin" echoes the routine of an endless series of mornings, as Guibert repositions himself in a 'present' which is actually an ongoing reality for him. It is no surprise, then, that the text ends with another medical appointment, recounted from the same close distance as the previous passages. This passage marks one shift for Guibert, as he ends his book with a stated intention to move on to the medium of film, but by the end of the passage we have still not managed to fully escape the examination room; he even uses the camera to film his doctor, Claudette Dumouchel, indicating that his preoccupations will not alter alongside the change in medium. There are many more of these mornings to come.

The greater frequency of deictic passages in *Le Protocole compassionnel* does allow for variety in tone or emotion, unlike the almost uniform uncertainty and despair of such sections in *À l'ami*. For instance, during a series of passages written from the 'present' of his time in Elba after he has begun a course of DDI, Guibert often remarks on how content he is. "Je suis heureux." (146) he plainly states, and, whilst he remains aware of the weakening of his body that often confines him to his bed, and which in turn makes writing difficult as he cannot easily get up (144), and is aware too of the spectacle that his body becomes to the island's inhabitants (141), there is a great amount of pleasure in these passages.

Chaque instant de cette journée a été un délice absolu : le réveil très tardif, le soulagement de dégager ma vessie puis le goût même amer du DDI du danseur mort qui m'a redonné vie, le petit déjeuner de fruits et de yaourts, les moments passés sous la tonnelle, la lecture des journaux, puis le travail, lui aussi délicieux, la vision de loin de jeunes militaires torses nus venus démonter les tentes où avaient dormi les musiciens malaisiens, toutes ces choses vivantes inattendues, tous ces mots vivants inattendus...

(145-146)

The passage continues to list many more pleasures of the day. Alongside the more sensual ‘delights’ relating to food, the sight of half-naked soldiers, or the bodily function of urination, Guibert’s frame of mind allows him to appreciate even the bitter taste of the DDI, and his capacity to work. The role of writing, suggested by “tous ces mots vivants inattendus,” is also central to Guibert’s happiness here. It is his contentment in Elba that allows him to write, but simultaneously, his ability to write in turn feeds his happiness. That this quotation refers to writing can be supported by Guibert’s statement at the beginning of the passage that “C’est quand j’écris que je suis le plus vivant.” (144), for which “ces mots vivants” is an echo that establishes writing as a life-giving force. That these words are unexpected to Guibert is also telling. Elba is a location associated with classic literature, including Virgil’s *Aeneid* (XXV, 221), and Guibert credits it with his own output: “cet endroit miraculeux, où je me sens si bien, où tout est beauté, où l’arrivée est plus heureuse que le soulagement du départ, et où j’ai écrit la plupart de mes livres...” (142). He conjures an image of a sacred place, first with “miraculeux” and then “où tout est beauté” which arguably heightens Elba’s literary aura in its recalling of Baudelaire’s refrain, “Là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté.” (‘L’invitation au voyage’, 13-14). Since Guibert’s relationship to the act of writing is volatile throughout *Le Protocole compassionnel*, his ability to rediscover pleasure for it in Elba solidifies the concept of the island as a place of literary inspiration. In this state of bliss, even death is tempered by the languid tone of these passages. Guibert entertains the idea of being buried here (143), and imagines people paying pilgrimage to his room after his death (150). Both passages paint death in mysticism, allowing it to become something Guibert is able to once more contemplate in a more abstract way than his condition would normally allow: as an example, his friend Gustave’s idea of faking a burial in the cemetery in order to actually bury him in the garden of their villa is not an especially realistic scenario, and Guibert’s reaction to it: “C’est idée m’enchante.” speaks more to the poetic or romantic quality of the notion than a practical appraisal. This is not to say that Guibert is flippant. The image we are left with at the end of this passage is quite melancholic, as it mixes a spiritual and transcendental idea of rebirth with the physical realities of his current condition: “Me lèverai-

je de mon cercueil comme je me lève de mon lit, en m'agrippant aux bords ou en me laissant tomber, maintenant que, grâce au DDI du danseur mort, je crois au mythe de la renaissance ?” (143). Nevertheless, Guibert is, for the moment, comfortable contemplating these questions. These examples, more than anything else, demonstrate the dramatic shifts that can occur between passages which concern themselves with the ‘present’ moment; although these changes would still be seen if the narrative tense and narrative position remained consistent throughout the text, the contrast is all the more stark because of the passages in which Guibert allows the immediacy of emotion to determine the tone of the narrative.

Naturally, then, his happiness does not last, as the realities of his illness rekindle his sense of despair. When his health turns, he rediscovers “De nouveau des limites, de nouveau la sensation que je vais mourir.” (151); he stops taking photos and is bothered by insects, he does not bathe (153-154), he notes the rat droppings in his room (169): all of this a grimy antithesis of the previous “délice absolue”. But there are also moments where Guibert attempts to get on with the routine his life, by continuing with his physiotherapy exercises (169, 174-175). In both passages, Guibert highlights the continuous action: “Boxer. Boxer comme le jeune Marocain [...] Boxer à poil dans le vide, dans l’infini, dans l’éternité.” (169) and “Je lutte. Mon Dieu que cette lutte est belle.” (175). The tone of the former is more ambiguous than the ostensibly more positive tone of the latter, but neither passage offers a definitive outlook as to the outcome of these exercises. Instead, similarly to the narrative’s treatment of his medical appointments, both passages leave the reader with the ongoing process, which is one of survival, as a final thought. Whereas the passages examined from *À l’ami* represented dramatic changes in Guibert’s life, here, much of the focus is on changes in perception whilst living with a terminal condition. Guibert shows what he feels in the moment, and, crucially, how volatile these emotions can be.

The most peculiar part of *Le Protocole compassionnel* is arguably the ‘Miracle à Casablanca’ narrative (199-249). This is for two main reasons. The first is the situation itself: Guibert travels to Casablanca on the back of one of the many letters that he received following the



publication of *À l'ami*, and his subsequent televisual appearance on *Apostrophes*. In this letter, a professor invites Guibert to Casablanca so that he might be cured by a holy man, 'Le Tunisien', who has been known to perform miracles. The reasons that Guibert gives for going are not straightforward, not least because he seems reticent to reveal his true motives: "Je ne sais plus au juste pourquoi je suis allé à Casablanca. Et pourtant, ce n'était qu'il y a quelques semaines. Avec le recul mon motif m'apparaît vague et irréal. J'ai menti [...] La vérité est que j'avais un but, mais aujourd'hui ce but a perdu sa raison. L'avouer le rendrait ridicule." (199). Over the next few pages a number of motives transpire, given to others at the time or proffered to the reader now, including: research for making a film (199), writing inspiration (201), curiosity, hope and desperation, as Guibert finds himself "à bout de tout, à bout de mes forces, en train de crever, tout simplement comme une pauvre bête." (201). One might additionally forge a comparison between this journey and a comment made earlier in the text when a friend tells him about Bruno, who had AIDS, and who went travelling at the end of his life: "La plupart des malades, à leur dernière extrémité, entreprennent comme ça un voyage, le plus loin possible," (107). Illness is not an uncommon travel companion, from travelling for one's convalescence, to the more symbolic assessment that "the myth of the journey...enables some pathographers to perceive themselves, disoriented by the trauma of physical imagery, as moving into a distant and strange country from which they would return to the ordinary world." (Raoul et al., 2007, 116). Whilst Guibert's intentions may reflect this, for Bruno—and thus, in reality, perhaps for Guibert too—the journey is a voyage further into the unknown, likely towards the realm of death. As regards Guibert's literal journey, part of the appeal of going to Casablanca is entering into the unknown, regardless of outcome; Guibert cites his curiosity and the "romanesque" (PC 201) nature of the trip, in much the same way that earlier in the text (but many months after his trip to Casablanca) Guibert said of the fantasies around his burial in Elba "C'est idée m'enchante." (143).

This brings us to the second reason of this section's peculiarity, which is its chronological position. Both the events of the Casablanca passage and the act of writing it up occur before

the events of the book's opening, where the reader finds Guibert at a point of complete despair, with DDI being his one hope of salvation. 'Miracle à Casablanca' is the result of Guibert forcing himself to write whilst in Rome (197). The Casablanca section is mostly written in the past tense, but it possesses some elements of the 'raw' writing process, particularly near the beginning, as we saw with the opening quoted earlier. These elements set up a tension between distance and closeness. The events occurred a few weeks before, which is only a short amount of time, but one which allows Guibert to suggest that he has no connection to the trip's meaning: "Avec le recul, mon motif m'apparaît vague et irréal." (199). However, the subsequent phrase "J'ai menti" reflects back on and refutes the previous words. This foregrounds, and thus brings the reader close to, the writing process, by reminding us that Guibert is writing the words we are reading, and is able to construct and change the narrative as he wishes. The 'present' of the writing process breaks through again, rather obtrusively, on page 211, which begins, "Il va falloir maintenant raconter, le plus en détail possible, mon séjour à Casablanca", which has the appearance of Guibert convincing himself of his statement of intent. His reference to time, with "Hier, quand j'ai entrepris ce récit," (Ibid.) reminds us that this narrative is the product of Guibert forcing himself to write every day, and breaks the illusion of a continuous narrative detached from a person sitting down and writing. As Genette wrote: "One of the fictions of literary narrating—perhaps the most powerful one, because it passes unnoticed, so to speak—is that the narrating involves an instantaneous action, without a temporal dimension." (Genette, 1980, 222); in contrast, Guibert's texts emphasise that temporal dimension to a highly effective degree. This reaches a somewhat teasing apex for the reader, when Guibert seemingly writes his thoughts aloud when trying to remember the name of the plane's stopover: "j'ai l'impression que ça commence avec un D, c'est une des villes les plus connues du Maroc [...] C'est n'est pas Djerba, bien sûr, qui me vient pourtant à l'esprit, mais si le D était une fausse piste ?" Perhaps this messy draft of a passage serves as a reminder that the events described are in the past: Guibert knows how all this ends, and it does not end hopefully. It reflects the boredom Guibert finds in writing texts whose ending he knows (198), as well as a reluctance to once more confront the disappointment of the journey.

Consequently, the narrative gets caught up in minutiae which project an emotional distance, before the narrative plays on, without further intrusion from Guibert's writing self.

'Miracle à Casablanca' baits the reader with the suggestion that Guibert gains some manner of enlightenment from his trip, when, following a warm, social gathering with his hosts, the Tunisian, and his wife, Lumière, he states: "Lumière m'a dit: « Que Dieu vous protège. » J'avais déjà dû entendre ces mots dans ma vie, mais ils n'avaient jamais eu aucun sens pour moi. Je les comprenais pour la première fois." (246). Yet in the subsequent scene in which Guibert finds himself unable to stand up again when he sits down on the beach, this phrase is revisited, "Dans le sable, j'écrivis, pour reprendre l'expression de Madame Lumière: « Que Dieu vous protège. » Mais je n'étais plus sûr de la comprendre, entre-temps son sens s'était échappé." (247). This is an appropriately Biblical image, recalling the unknown words that Jesus wrote on the ground in John 7:2-12; divine information which is lost to time. Guibert's desire to recapture an emotional resonance by recourse to the words Lumière spoke, going so far as to physically recreate them in the sand, is furthermore comparable to the actions of the unnamed protagonist of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*: when he chases after the sensation evoked by the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea by consuming ever more of that tea, he finds that the sensation diminishes in turn, and that it is to himself that he must turn (Proust I; 45). For Guibert, Casablanca has not offered a tangible or lasting message, but perpetuated the notion of the fleeting nature of hope that is dependent on Guibert's unstable outlook on his condition; external snatches of inspiration cannot be sustained.

After such a long detour into the past (this is the longest passage of the book), the beginning of the next section brings us back to (another) reality. "Elbe-Paris." (250) signals a return to Guibert's normal life, even if the journey referenced here is one taken many months after his trip to Casablanca. These two words help to orient the reader to the narrative's timeline: from his journey to Casablanca, which was written about in Rome before he had access to DDI, back (textually, but forwards in time) to his trip to Elba after he began his course of DDI, and then back to Paris, to a point in time set after any of the previous passages. Despite the

temporal distance between Casablanca and “Elbe-Paris”, the narrative structure means that the weight of disappointment and hopelessness from the end of the Casablanca trip leads into this passage; the helpless uncertainty of the past is brought forwards to a post-DDI Guibert. Therefore, whilst our interpretation of ‘Miracle à Casablanca’ is bound by the time it was written, its positioning in the text and proximity with the most recent ‘present’ from which Guibert is writing speaks to the timelessness of its implications. That is to say, the passage was written from the perspective of Guibert in Rome, on Prozac but not DDI, shortly before the despair we find him in at the beginning of the text. Despite this specificity, however, it also neatly represents the more general volatility of his existence, and demonstrates the emotional rather than chronological arrangement of the text, to which the immediacy of the writing moment is so central.

There is no established ‘present’ from which the narrator is speaking, or writing, in either text. The narrator, who is identified with the author, reminds the reader that not only is he constructing the text we are reading, but that writing is a vital part of his life. Apart from when his physical or mental condition render him unable to write, instances which are flagged up in the narrative as being significant because they deviate from his usual writing practice, Guibert presents himself as someone who is constantly writing his experience. A narrator who is writing the story is not by any means unusual, but there is no single point in time that the narrative converges towards, because the ‘present’ is ever shifting. More than an acknowledgement of the creation of the text, the presence of the writing process compels the reader to view each text through the lens of its specific moment(s) of construction.

### Style

Part of the ‘self-consciousness’ of Guibert’s texts is due to the passages which put us in the shifting ‘present’ of the writing process. It is also found in the passages which reflect on their stylistic construction, and it is to this more obviously literary practice that this chapter now

turns. This discussion will consider the self-reflexivity of Guibert's writing style, and will also highlight how the focus shifts between the two texts, becoming a more prominent topic in *Le Protocole compassionnel*.

The figure of Thomas Bernhard looms in *À l'ami*, forming a lens through which considerations of writerly voice are focused. As established earlier, Bernhard's influence is not hidden from the reader, but nor is it clearly flagged up in some of the earlier passages that could be said to mimic his style. The uncovering of Bernhard's influence is not dissimilar to the manner in which the reader uncovers the full meaning of other plot points, such as the significance of the AZT. Even without knowing about Bernhard, the reader is able to simply appreciate the effects of his recreated style on the reading experience, and build interpretations on that basis: Guibert employs this style when he is uncertain, or describing traumatic experiences which seem to burst through the confines of a more conventional or restrained syntax. Once the connection to Bernhard is known, one need not dismiss that interpretation, but merely expand it to include Guibert's reliance on an existing stylistic framework to express himself when his own seems insufficient; for Guibert, living with HIV includes figuring out how he can express this new reality. Then we come to the passages in which Guibert directly comments that he is writing in Bernhard's style. Guibert highlights the toxicity of "T.B." early on in the text, "Un diable s'est glissé dans mes soutes: T.B. Je me suis arrêté de le lire pour stopper l'empoisonement." (12), and he goes on to pathologise this alien force invading his writing through comparisons to HIV and cancer in later passages (172-173, 230-233).<sup>5</sup> The first of the passages directly naming Bernhard consists of one long sentence and describes his time in an unknown institution (172-174). Unlike the AZT passages, no specific date is given and it is initially difficult to place where exactly Guibert is. His use of 'encore' in "encore pensionnaire de cette académie" (172) despite the fact that none of the recent previous passages have referred to this institute, thrusts the reader into an unknown context without a guide, although as we will see, the exact context is perhaps not necessary. Guibert's description of "les écrivains, soudain

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<sup>5</sup> See 'The Body'

dénués de toute personnalité, se mettent à parodier leurs aînés, écrit Thomas Bernhard par pure diversion” (172) is not a flattering assessment of the writing he is producing in this moment; it is only a parody of a master’s style, lacking purpose.

Due to chronic lung ailments, Bernhard spent time in sanatoria throughout his life, and illness was present in his work. Jack Davis writes “the prototypical Bernhard character is a man who is terminally or chronologically ill and fixated on his illness.” (Davis, 2013, 54), thus Guibert mirrors Bernhard in theme as well as style. More specifically, Guibert, in his diaries, cites reading the autobiographical text *Wittgensteins Neffe* (MAU 482). An account of Bernhard’s friendship with Paul Wittgenstein and their shared experiences in hospital, the latter for mental distress, its concerns intersect with the content of this passage. In a section which reflects a certain loss of individuality, this shared experience may not be a comfort, but exacerbate his conception of his limitations as a writer.

Clause after clause, the passage builds a series of images covering a non-delineated period of time, resulting in the creation of an atmosphere rather than the recounting of action. This atmosphere can be summarised by the oft-repeated term “malheur”, as the descriptions are overwhelmingly concerned with the apparently mentally ill wife of a fellow resident of the academy and the morbid fixation on her misfortune shared by the collective “nous” employed for most of the passage. Guibert’s assessment of being stripped of personality is tied to his writing identity, but it is also true to say that the passage lacks the personal intimacy of the rest of the text, which is replaced by its ostensibly collective narration and primary focus on another person. The “malheur” of the passage is furthermore externalised. The focus on the woman’s personal circumstances forms part of this, as it allows one person to become a vehicle for the residents, channelled through Guibert, to explore the extremities of misfortune, relieving them of the need to confront their own; their relative power is seen with “la farouche volonté de pousser cette femme au bout de son malheur” (173) which transforms the collective into a predatory pack picking off a wounded creature. Misfortune is also externalised through the creation of its architectural tangibility: descriptions like “cette citadelle du malheur” (172)

at the beginning of the passage and “notre académie mourante est devenue une usine bourdonnante du malheur” (174) present structures that can localise and contain it. At one point, Guibert describes how he normally avoids the gardens, and how, approaching its edges one time, he felt he was walking into “la plus haute concentration du malheur” (173); it is as if he is describing a danger zone for the contagion of misfortune. The adoption of a style other than his own suits the sense of distance from his own experiences and feelings created through the aforementioned elements. Whilst the passage demonstrates a preoccupation with misfortune that could be applied to his own situation, the way it is presented shows an unwillingness or inability to focus on the personal.

Recourse to Bernhard occurs again in Section 73 (230-233), although this time Guibert uses Bernhard’s style to examine his influence on his writing. This begins humorously enough with a general review of Bernhard’s writing, during which Guibert’s envy turns into imitation, as the sentence begins to expand with a spattering of epithets intended as a takedown: “il était indéniablement bien meilleur écrivain que moi, et pourtant, ce n’était qu’un patineur, un tricoteur, un ratiocineur qui tirait à la ligne, un faiseur de lapalissalades syllogistiques,....” (230), and continues to the next page a tongue-in-cheek critical appraisal of his works. Following this, however, his ‘Bernhardian’ sentences become an illustration of how Bernhard’s writing, alongside and in the same fashion as the HIV virus, corrupts and progressively takes over Guibert’s identity (231-233). The comparison with HIV will more closely be examined in the next chapter, but here, it is Guibert’s decision to grapple with this style that is important. Before expanding on his pathological comparisons, Guibert states, in the shortest sentence of this passage: “J’avais eu l’imprudence, pour ma part, d’engager un jeu d’échecs cuisants avec Thomas Bernhard.” (231); if the first bloated sentence, coming before this and quoted above, saw Guibert seemingly using Bernhard’s style against him, the ‘Bernhardian’ sentences following this one demonstrate the style overwhelming and taking over his writing. Guibert additionally describes this process as “[un] sortilège que je me suis infligé à *dessein* par l’entremise de Thomas Bernhard,” (233) (emphasis mine). Nobody is

forcing Guibert's hand. The decision to write is his own, and to some extent allows him to flex his own writing skills and show off his ability to parody another's style. The failure, as he perceives it, arises from the fact that parody is not mastery; Guibert admires Bernhard's writing, and it is his hubristic goal ("dépasser [Bernhard] dans sa propre monstruosité" (233)) which puts that writing in opposition to himself. His interaction with Bernhard's style in this passage, however, is not merely representative of a literary endeavour gone wrong. Woven into this Bernhardian battle are a number of traumatic events: the passage opens with a reference to Jules returning from Lisbon "traumatisé" by his son's sudden illness, with Guibert, in turn, "paralysed" into inaction; in the course of this passage, Guibert, writing from 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1989, also reveals the disastrous results of his blood tests. His perceived limits as a writer, therefore, are explored in the context of his powerlessness in other aspects of his life; per his own albeit humorous conclusion, "moi pauvre petit Guibert, ex-maître du monde qui avait trouvé plus fort que lui et avec le sida et avec Thomas Bernhard." (233). HIV/AIDS presents its own obstacles to expression, both through its unknowability as a then new condition, and the physical and emotional trauma it causes, but, as this passage demonstrates, part of the challenge of its expression also rests with Guibert's writing abilities. Underlying the choice of producing this Bernhardian writing out of traumatic incidents in his life is the fear that his own literary skills are insufficient to express himself as he desires.

The 'battle' between Guibert and Bernhard does not constitute the entirety of *À l'ami*, and nor does Guibert consistently parody his style throughout. In fact, the rest of the book is evidence that Guibert is not struck completely inactive either by the progress of the HIV virus, or by his perceived inability to live up to his literary ambitions. From passages such as the ones discussed, emerges an anxiety about his writerly identity. Part of this is conveyed through the textual, because, couched in wry self-mocking humour though they are, Guibert's statements still present a fear of losing one's individual style. However, even seemingly obvious statements need to be backed up by other aspects of the narrative, and so the other part of this effect is achieved through narrative structure. As the shifts to different points in the chronology



of the book recreated the chaos of Guibert's changing existence, here the apparent lapses into another's style convey a break in routine; on one level the narrative position shifts to focus on writing, but these passages additionally stand in contrast to incidental references that he is writing this book (e.g. "mais à ce jour, 20 mars, où j'achève la mise au propre de ce livre" (239)), as they mark a different sort of writing for Guibert. Looking at the individual structure of each passage, we see that the anxiety expressed in these passages is not exclusively related to his writing skills. Mortality pervades his writerly anxiety, seen through the preoccupation with the woman's misfortune, which can be read as a projection of his own outlook on his circumstances, and the traumatic opening and then comparison between Bernhard's influence and the catastrophic progress of the HIV virus in Guibert's body. The sense of defeat is amplified by the limited time he has in which to become master of his craft; hence, his fear is not just that he has not mastered Bernhard, but that he will die without having mastered Bernhard. It is a fear about a prospective lack of control, and about Guibert's legacy; the line "ex-maître du monde qui avait trouvé plus fort que lui et avec le sida et avec Thomas Bernhard." (233) almost reads like an epitaph. That Bernhard died in February 1989—an event between Guibert's diagnosis in 1988 and the publication of *À l'ami* in 1990—renders the appraisal of one's oeuvre particularly urgent; Guibert may soon also die without replicating the success, as he sees it, of Bernhard. The impression of panic conveyed through long sentences which seem to run away from Guibert should not, however, take away from Guibert's abilities; labyrinthine though they are, Guibert's imitations are very readable, demonstrating his existing writerly control even as he utilises the style to amplify his feelings of inadequacy. Guibert's writing has not failed, but these reflections on literary style and writing identity can be said to present the challenges of writing exacerbated by an awareness of one's legacy through approaching death.

*Le Protocole compassionnel* does not have an overbearing literary idol (or rival), but it does contain a higher frequency of self-reflexive comments on Guibert's style and the role of

writing in his life. As mentioned earlier, Guibert stated on *Apostrophes* that he would not write again, and the question of writing versus not writing is a more prominent theme in *Le Protocole compassionnel* than it was in *À l'ami*. Therefore, the existence of more passages which reflect on Guibert's own style could be attributed to Guibert's 'return' to writing following an extended hiatus, and his consequent rediscovery of the pleasure of his writing practice. Whereas passages on style in *À l'ami* were focused around a theme of identity, reflections in *Le Protocole compassionnel* include more general comments about the type of writing he enjoys, and his thrill at the intricacies of word choice in the construction of a text.

Writing is a pleasure and a preoccupation for Guibert. One passage during his stay at Elba opens: "C'est quand j'écris que je suis le plus vivant. Les mots sont beaux, les mots sont justes, les mots sont victorieux, n'en déplaise à David, qui a été scandalisé par le slogan publicitaire: « La première victoire des mots sur le sida. »" (144). Already his enjoyment of the process of writing plays out in his tripartite repetition, wherein he can be seen to try out different adjectives to describe his love of words. This is developed when he goes on to similarly play around with words as he describes mentally revising what he has written each day, "une description pourrait être encore plus vraie, plus précise, plus économe, il y manque tel mot," (144); his rephrasing here mimics the act of revision he is describing, each clause representing the development of one thought to the next, as Guibert adds to or changes a phrase. This process makes the writing in this passage come alive, as we see its evolution. Even his pleasure, however, is framed by AIDS. The slogan, referencing the publication of *À l'ami*, is introduced in contention, and the passage can in turn be viewed either as a support or a counterargument to it. Alongside Guibert's own choice of "victorieux" echoing the "victoire" of the slogan, is his friend's negative reaction to it. Without needing to know the explanation for this reaction, whether it is an appraisal of Guibert's writing and potentially ill-chosen praise, or shock at the suggestion of words conquering AIDS, the strong negative emotion signified by "scandalisé" acts as our first refutation of the statement. How are we to understand "victoire des mots sur le sida"? On the one hand, Guibert's assertion of writing as a life-giving

force chimes with an interpretation that views AIDS as representative of death and despair, and which words are able to counter. On the other hand, into the very same passage in which Guibert's pleasure of revising his writing is demonstrated so sharply, creeps the reality of his illness: "il y manque tel mot, j'hésite à me relever pour l'ajouter, j'ai quand même du mal à descendre du lit [...] Sinon, retrouverai-je demain le mot qui manquait ? Non." (144). Shortened here for brevity, the passage includes a lengthy description of the painstaking actions he would have to undertake in order to get out of his bed and find his manuscript to correct it; a lengthy description which itself, like any of his others, could be so easily extinguished by the bathetic verdict of "Non." The dependence on his weakening body in order to complete a simple writing task suggests that rather than mastering the illness, writing is in fact greatly affected by his physical condition. Ultimately, the passage does not offer a definitive response to the claim of the slogan. It presents the reality of his condition alongside the pleasure of writing, and goes on to be largely positive about his stay in Elba. The previous section showed that his trip to Elba showcases a period of contentment which benefits his writing, but which is not permanent. It is much the same here. Guibert makes no bombastic claims of his own about writing conquering AIDS, and instead presents his experience in the moment of writing; that is, it is not what has been written (the published *À l'ami*), that most sustains him, but the moment of creation.

The importance of writing to Guibert's wellbeing further clarifies the reason he is so averse to writing about Casablanca, beyond the disappointment of the trip's outcome. He states, "Je racontais une histoire dont je connaissais le début, le déroulement et la fin, puisque je l'avais vécue, et c'est peut-être pour cela qu'elle m'ennuyait comme un labeur monotone : parce qu'il n'y avait cette marge d'imprévue, réservé à l'écriture vivante, à l'écriture gaie." (197-198). The notion of "l'écriture vivante" corresponds to Guibert's favouring of the process of creation over the finished product; uncertainty can inspire, as his text 'lives' in the same moment as him. We can compare this attitude to that in the previous passage written in Elba, where Guibert takes pleasure in mulling over his work and thinking up revisions; in short, in the

process of creating something new. Prior to this, the passage includes a retrospective on his youthful writing, in response to which he says “J’avais envie d’une écriture gaie, limpide, immédiatement « communicante », pas d’une écriture tarabiscotée.” (197). This resistance to overly ornate writing is in keeping with Guibert’s prioritisation of immediacy in his texts; much of his own style indelibly links the writing process to his emotional state, thus communicating the particularities of the moment described. It is in this passage too that Guibert once more references Bernhard and how one’s writing always falls short of what one wants it to be; the anxiety of *À l’ami* has not entirely left him. Guibert needs his writing to fulfil him, although one might question how we can reconcile the rest of the text with the reasoning that he finds it boring to write about Casablanca because he has lived through it. After all, *Le Protocole compassionnel* comprises many events he has lived through, even if these only occurred in the very recent past. This can be answered with reference to the multiple aspects that set out ‘Miracle à Casablanca’ as a self-contained episode: its length, its positioning in the text, its inclusion of a location and characters which are not revisited again, and the fact that, as opposed to the rest of the text, it is signposted as being written at a point in time before Guibert began his course of DDI. All of these set it apart from the ‘ongoing’ nature of the rest of the narrative: although dealing with different and often very specific events (such as certain medical procedures), *Le Protocole compassionnel* presents the new daily existence of Guibert, the ultimate anticipated outcome of which, death, remains unknowable. This is not to say that the text could have dispensed with ‘Miracle à Casablanca’. It illustrates the emotional point from which the post-DDI action of the book progresses, written when he was, in his own words, “déjà au fond du gouffre” (198), and can furthermore act as a microcosm for the emotional trajectory of the text, as it shows the back-and-forth nature of hope and despair. That Guibert does not enjoy writing it, nor consider it representative of the sort of writing he wants to produce, does not detract from, but rather supports its illustrative function in the text. It demonstrates how, alongside considerations such as the time when Guibert was writing, his emotional state provides another framework within which to interpret the text.

Another aspect of his writing that Guibert puts forth is one which sets his work firmly in the category of autofiction: the nature of truth. This is a topic explored more in the third chapter, and whose relevance here is limited to the two occasions in which he explicitly brings it up in relation to his oeuvre. “[Q’]ils sont traversés, entre autres choses, par la vérité et le mensonge” (132), is one of the characteristics of his works that Guibert concedes in his defence against his friend David’s appraisal of his works as “méchants”; his own vision of his work resides within the margins of contradiction, an image of “une œuvre barbare et délicat”. Unlike the petty nastiness or mediocrity of ‘méchant’, ‘barbare’ can encompass cruelty and primitivism. Rather than attempting to merely shock, this could imply his work attempts an exploration of a particular primitive state. This is supported by its juxtaposition with “délicat”, which, alongside sensitivity, denotes refinement and thus frames his ‘barbarism’ within the tenderness of thoughtful construction. The issue of truth is often born out of such paradoxes, allowing Guibert to observe at a different point “C’est quand ce que j’écris prend la forme d’un journal que j’ai la plus grande impression de fiction.” (103). This comment can be read as another instance of Guibert casting doubt on the veracity of his account, but it furthermore illustrates the artificiality of any life writing, as, however truthful one is trying to be, one is still imposing a narrative on one’s own life. He recognises this mix of truth and fiction as an inclination of his writing. Since these comments describe a more general pattern to his writing, they can also be viewed as self-reflexive comments on the text in which they are included, and so the reader of *Le Protocole compassionnel* is primed to view the work within that elusive framework of contradiction. The text’s understanding of truth, however, is not limited to its opposition to fiction, as will be explained. There are a number of challenges to Guibert’s writing that he faces up to in the course of the text. The impact of physical constraints and mortality was briefly touched on and will be expanded in the next chapter, but another limit is the struggle to definitively capture the full ‘truth’ of a situation. At one point in the text, Guibert records the words of a fellow patient of Claudette, who is pestering him after he has left his appointment. The mere recording of these words is not enough, and he remarks on the words he has just written “Ces mots de rien du tout avaient pourtant pour moi un sens presque

immédiat avant d’être décalqués dans ce récit.” (53); “décalqués” or traced, suggests that he has failed to capture more than a superficial version of the scene, and that the meaning that the words had for him in that moment has been lessened through the act of consigning them to writing. This statement of his failure is the only evidence the reader has of whatever that meaning was. Unsatisfied with the situation, the reader is left with a moment of frustration with the writing process; if Guibert is unable to capture the immediacy of that particular moment, he can at least offer the immediacy of his attempt to capture it, through the writing process’ intrusion into the narrative. A similar ‘failure’ occurs at the end of the text, where Guibert is unable to stop after his ‘final’ line: “Toute est marchandage dans la vie. La mort c’est la reconciliation. C’est sur cette phrase que je voulais terminer mon livre. Je n’y arriverai pas.” (260). This reluctance could signal an inability to face up to death by having the image of it conclude his book. Instead, he provides us with this intended final line and includes his struggle to face the end, resulting in a less polished narrative; as with the previous example, we are left with the process of construction rather than a fully realised product. In keeping with this, a second false ending of sorts follows, in his description of filming Claudette: “Le mot *End* s’est mis à clignoter dans l’image-témoin. Fin de bande.” (Ibid.) The actual final paragraph of the text contains a statement in the present tense, “je finis mon livre”, with the penultimate line in the perfect tense “J’ai commencé à tourner un film.” (261); this creates an overlap in creative processes, as he has begun to film before finishing his book, so that yet again there is no real ‘ending’ marked, as the text finishes mid-process. Unlike the entrapment at the end of *À l’ami*, he is able to surpass the boundaries of his own book, as his actions extend beyond it. A counterargument to this could be that the move to filming can be seen as a definitive ending for the writing process, which is to say that Guibert does not extend beyond his text through his words but through actions outside of it. Of the failure to commit to the desired final sentence, Boulé asks “Should this be seen as the failure of literature? In any case, as has been shown, the book’s entire thematic calls for the film project,” (Boulé, 1999, 222). My own argument accepts that the false ending(s) of *Le Protocole compassionnel* can be seen as a failure to fully express oneself, but I am reluctant to extend that assessment to denote a

“failure of literature”. The mixing of writing and filming in this passage need not place one art form in opposition to the other; in earlier parts of the text, Guibert’s filming has quite comfortably resided as a topic within his writing, without the superiority of either coming into question. And whilst there is a ‘handing over’ of sorts from one form to the other, this does not negate the earlier point about the ‘mid-process’ ending of the book; it opens up a new space rather than shutting off writing to concede to another form. Guibert finds pleasure too in the writing process, and the text benefits from its presence. The ending is in keeping with the rest of the text which often centres the act of creation rather than the finished work.

The final part of analysis of *Le Protocole compassionnel*’s stylistic self-consciousness involves a number of passages which show Guibert at his most playful with language. In these examples, pleasure is not only evident in the language and construction of a text, but also in Guibert’s self-aware commentary on his work. All of these passages take place during medical examinations, the relevance of which will become clear. In the first (121-127), the narrative is consistently interrupted with comments on language and techniques which Guibert enjoys in texts. Guibert describes going to his appointment and the relationship as he sees it between himself and his doctor, Claudette; he describes what she is wearing (“Pantalon bleu” (122)), the pain he feels in his leg, and then, when talking about what he is, or is not, wearing (“Je n’avais pas mis mon badge avec la tête de mort aux lunettes noires et au chapeau bleu”), he happens to repeat the word ‘bleu’. If the reader did not notice the repetition independently, Guibert immediately points it out “J’aime bien faire arriver du bleu dans un récit, même si ça crée une répétition à dix lignes de distance.” (122). The passage is transformed from a narrative voice telling the reader the story, back into the physical object in their hands, which is composed of a series of lines, within which repetition can be numerically measured. Guibert calls attention to the potential jarring of repetition, a disruption he is willing to accept (“même si...”), and in doing so, he breaks up the flow of the text even further than a simple repetition would have done. Guibert furthermore reveals the inner workings of a text, suggesting that linguistic choices can be guided by the whims of the author. Whilst the first instance of the

colour blue reads as a straight-forward factual description of the trousers Claudette is wearing, the second instance arises in a description of what Guibert is *not* wearing; in singling out 'bleu', we can see that the creation of a text entails the details the author chooses to focus on, as well as external information he chooses to bring into a scene. This first interruption is a brief side note, but the next one expands until it overtakes the 'main' action of the passage:

Je suis allé porter moi-même le sachet avec tout mon sang en hémato, j'aimerais manier parfaitement le jargon des médecins, c'est comme un truc codé, ça me donne l'illusion vis-à-vis d'eux de ne pas être le gosse devant lequel on parle anglais pour les histoires de cul. J'aime le langage fluide, presque parlé, et j'aime maintenant porter mon sang alors qu'auparavant je serais tombé dans les pommes, j'aurais eu les genoux coupés. J'aime que ça passe le plus directement possible entre ma pensée et la vôtre, que le style n'empêche pas la transfusion. Est-ce que vous supportez un récit avec autant de sang ? Vincent m'a dit : « Forcément, ton livre a du succès, les gens aiment le malheur des autres. » Maintenant j'aime les livres pleins de sang, il faudrait que ça coule en rigoles, que ça fasse des nappes, des lacs, des piscines, que ça inonde le texte.

(123)

There are several ideas to unpick in this passage, and not all will be addressed at this stage<sup>6</sup>. This lengthy side note springs forth from the action of transporting his own blood sample through the hospital. As he takes on this simulacrum of a medical role, his first port of call is the issue of medical jargon. Specialist lexis is a prime example of the way in which language can exclude others, and here that is viewed through the power dynamic of the doctor/patient relationship. Guibert wants to redress the balance of power between him and the doctors, which is currently in their favour, as his HIV diagnosis and later development of AIDS has forced him into a medical context and thus an unfamiliar lexicon. The image of a child kept in the dark about the adults' sexual exploits frames this exclusion as deliberate, although it also helps to convey frustration at his own ignorance and subsequent need to master the language. In any case, it presents the power of the medical institution; despite his attempts at matching them, Guibert is ultimately the one who, through medical examinations and treatments, is placed in a submissive role. Carrying his blood becomes a metaphor for his writing. Blood has multiple significations here: it refers to his literal blood which becomes a

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<sup>6</sup> See 'The Body'



spectacle as it is drawn from his body and subjected to medical examinations; he plays with the idea of infection, through the literal infection of his blood with the HIV virus, and the metaphorical infection of the reader through the transfusion that the language of the text provides; as a visceral metonymy of life, blood confers a certain intimacy, as demonstrated in the ways Guibert reveals himself in his texts. Whilst aware of readers' potential fascination with the suffering of others, Guibert is not attempting to hide anything, but builds and channels the intensity of his experiences for his own purposes. With this, he is able to bring the reader closer to the lifeblood of his experiences. Very shortly after this interruption, (slightly over "dix lignes de distance"), Guibert offers another: "Et puis les résultats sont envoyés par fax, voilà un autre genre de jargon que j'aime aussi manier : les mots des nouveaux outils, qui n'existaient pas dans des livres écrits plus tôt." (124). As far as the content of the interruption is concerned, a fax machine represents technology, but is also mundane, and we can presume Guibert realises that the reference to technology will in turn date his own book; it is another way of focusing the text in the moment. The focus on the method by which they will be sent, rather than the results themselves, corresponds to the more general pattern of the narrative infringements in this passage, which delay the action in a scene and centre instead the manner in which it is written about. The aim is, perhaps, to dull the power the medical institution has over Guibert and his own lack of control, or the voyeurism the reader can gain from such scenes. He is reminding us of his presence as author.

Language also allows Guibert to extract pleasure from medical examinations. The relationship between him and Claudette is throughout the text framed as a pseudo-love affair, or, at least, an unrequited affection on Guibert's part; in this same passage alone, he muses about writing of "mon histoire d'amour avec Claudette" (127). This is no straightforward crush. Despite a conversation with his psychiatrist friend in which Guibert states he has no erotic interest in men anymore and his friend responds "Guibert vire sa cuti" (260) in terms of his stated lack of erotic attraction to men, Guibert does not present himself as anything other than gay. He plays with his father's heteronormative ambition that Guibert become a doctor (94, 125),

imagining that he would have married someone like Claudette (125), but there are also times that he imagines Claudette to be a lesbian (256), thus excluding the possibility of reciprocal attraction. Guibert's attraction remains a very tongue-in-cheek exploration of her as a character, and comments more on the bizarre intimacy between patient and doctor than it does a romantic entanglement. As Claudette calls Guibert into her room, Guibert builds from his comment that Claudette is "le médecin les plus ponctuel du service" (125) to ponder on and play with grammatical gender. Thinking on the grammatical rules that relegate Claudette as doctor ('un médecin') to a masculine declination of "ponctuel", Guibert in turn muses "Claudette n'est-elle pas un peu masculine?" and so mixes the feminine and the masculine with the necessary declination of 'masculin'. "Masculine" acts as a response to "ponctuel", using the rigidity of grammar rules to express fluidity in gender. It is a game with language that is in keeping with the way in which Guibert plays with Claudette's identity and with their relationship, and his observations about language allow his enjoyment of this process to shine through.

This passage contains disparate ideas about what Guibert likes. It shows how experiences are formed (and controlled) into a text, and the pleasure derived from that process of textual construction. This passage also contains the first of a number of examples of the space between what is said and unsaid with regards to Claudette. Guibert narrates to us, the reader, what he almost tells Claudette, which is the effort that went into selecting his underwear for the examination. His comment "Heureusement j'ai fermé mon bec," (126) accepts the real world social embarrassment he might have felt had he said this, which is absent from his commitment of the unsaid words in the text. Two further examples of this emerge in a later passage (250-254). In the first, Guibert displays a sort of romantic jealousy towards Claudette's interactions with another patient, "Après, pendant tout l'examen j'avais au bout de langue: « Alors on se laisse faire des croche-pattes par de maladies un peu trop sympathiques! », mais je ne l'ai pas sorti, heureusement." (251). In the second, he subverts the expectation of relief implicit in the "heureusement" which, even without echoing "Heureusement j'ai fermé mon bec,"

establishes the tension between impulse and rationality; referencing her spiky hairstyle, it follows: “J’ai alors pensé cette phrase : « Si nous étions fiancés, je vous appellerais mon petit hérisson. » Mais je ne l’ai pas dite. Malheureusement.” (252). Although the second comment is much friendlier than the first, it is no more appropriate a comment to make to one’s doctor, and so “malheureusement” does not signal the missed opportunity to make a light-hearted comment, but acts as an extension of the unsaid flirtatious comment, that itself remains said only in the context of the narrative. The variation on the syntactic parallelism between the two sentences adds to the playfully humorous tone. All three examples relate to the imagined romantic entanglement between Guibert and Claudette which is itself representative of the ability to construct a new reality through writing. In the ‘real world’ situation of his appointments, leaving them unsaid prevents one realm spilling into the other, but in writing, the two can coexist. With this basis, we can read his assessments of his (un)fortunately (un)said comments as a display of his self-awareness as the author of these scenes; he is able to frame his propriety in the moment with a characteristic contradiction, as the reader receives the ‘unsaid’ version of events, which, in all its fantasy constitutes the full ‘truth’ of the scenes that Guibert wishes to convey.

Reflections on writing in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, even when highlighting its limitations, reveal a preoccupation with the process of creation. There is more focus on his own output than in *À l’ami*. He is writing beyond the initial shock of diagnosis and his grappling with the twin invasions of the HIV virus and Bernhard into his work; obstacles and limits to his writing remain, but he is more focused on his own style and its capabilities than on the usurpation of his writing identity. Guibert is playful with his use of language and style in both texts. Even the fear of Bernhard’s invasion can be seen as a chance to exploit the mannerisms of his style to convey that sense of fear through the text; moreover, Guibert’s approach leaves room to make jokes at his own expense, as when he dubbed himself “ex-maître du monde” (AMI 233). Without a singular idol to rate his work against, *Le Protocole compassionnel* is able to reflect on many more aspects of his own style. In the first section of this chapter we saw that the gap

between narrated events and the moment of their narration is narrower in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, which could account for the self-conscious approach to style in these passages as well. His fashioning of the text exists closer to the moment of experience, so that his writing adopts a version of the reflective tone of a journal; he is more aware of transforming a present event into a narrative. Whereas reflections in *À l'ami* foreground Guibert's lack of control, their expression in *Le Protocole compassionnel* convey a greater sense of enjoyment of and mastery over his work, even if it is only performative: his choice of language, the interruptions of his medical appointments and the concurrence of two 'realities' allow him to control the narrative of these scenes, even if this does not extend to his reality.

The aim of this chapter was to explore the ways in which Guibert centres the writing process in his texts, in order to determine the balance of control conveyed in the narratives. There is not a clear split between writing being the one area where Guibert is master and his life being one where he is not. As shown in this chapter, part of the self-conscious writing process is to demonstrate the doubts which Guibert has about his own writing, and his struggles to express himself, as well as the way in which circumstances can affect writing rather than the other way around; this can be done positively as well as negatively, as the impact of his vacation in Elba showed. That said, Guibert is constructing a narrative; even at his most desperate he is able to frame what the reader focuses on. The effective presentation of his situational volatility requires a high degree of organisation. Self-conscious writing shows enough of Guibert's hand in constructing his texts to assert him as the author controlling the narrative, at the same time as it presents his anxieties, and is a technique used to explore Guibert's perceived or actual lack of control in certain situations. What this creates is an ongoing negotiation between reader and text, as the reassertion of the writing process throughout both texts adds another level through which a particular passage must be examined. Guibert is refiguring how writing can convey his life. Although most examples in this chapter have focused heavily on writing which reflects on writing, this pattern will hold in confrontation with other themes such as his body

and the unsayable. The next chapter will look at what happens when writing is challenged on a physical, practical level by AIDS and the ways in which Guibert seeks to control his own image in response.

## THE BODY

‘The body’ is a far-reaching topic. In French literature, one of its common associations is with *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous’ term for a strongly literary focused category of feminist thought, which explores how women’s expression operates in and contends with the existing system of a patriarchal language, and, within that, considers how women ‘write themselves’ and write their bodies into the text. (Cixous, 1975). The body becomes a central concern through the need to recalibrate the hierarchical partitioning of traits and symbols:

French feminism finds deception at the base of the great, Western intellectual traditions which presume to derive Truth from the mind as separate from the body [...] the analyses of French feminists work to demonstrate the fundamental inseparability and interdependence of concepts of mind and body, reason and emotion, and, ultimately, masculinity and femininity.

(Weil, 2006, 154)

When we consider the body in this sense, it is not a separate object to be described in the text by the self, but constitutes that very self. Although not an example of *écriture féminine*, Guibert’s texts demonstrate a comparable perception of the body. The diagnosis and advancement of the HIV virus in his body alter it, and thus necessarily alter his writing, as he integrates the body into these texts. The concern of this chapter is to examine Guibert’s body as affected by HIV/AIDS, and his subsequent relationship to writing, covering how HIV/AIDS impacts his writing practice, how the body is incorporated into the narrative, and finally, how writing is used to attempt to subvert the ways in which the body is turned into a spectacle by others. Alongside these issues is the question of control and the extent to which we can view Guibert’s relationship to writing as a transformative one, subverting the seemingly catastrophic invasion of HIV/AIDS into the text for his own means.

### Dying vs writing

Before launching into a discussion on Guibert's own particular motivations and practices, it is important to underpin it with what actually constitutes AIDS. The last chapter touched on a distinction derived on a physiological level, from an assessment of T-cell levels. The concern of this chapter is more symptomatic, and focuses often on the visibly symptomatic, which can make his body a spectacle to others. An efficient, medicalised definition is as follows:

AIDS is not a virus but a set of symptoms (or syndrome) caused by the HIV virus. A person is said to have AIDS when their immune system is too weak to fight off infection, and they develop certain defining symptoms and illnesses. This is the last stage of HIV, when the infection is very advanced, and if left untreated will lead to death.

(Avert.org)

At the time that Guibert was writing, the lack of effective medication and the early stages of medical research into AIDS meant it was seen as a death sentence. The body that is writing is subject to the effects of a compromised immune system, which, for Guibert, manifests in rapid weight loss, fatigue, debility and, additionally, the side-effects of any drugs he takes. It is not merely an ill body that is of concern here, but a dying body, and this fact is omnipresent in the texts. When death is an inevitability, what are the stakes of writing about one's experience with AIDS, and why would one choose to do so?

The choice of writing over suicide is made explicit by Guibert (AMI 68, 161). This view of two paths is not unique to him. Ross Chambers outlines the political significance of this choice:

[...] the decision, (sometimes explicit, sometimes implied) to live with AIDS and to bear witness to the ordeal it entails, in preference to the temptation of a fast and relatively easy death, through suicide—a death that is of course, appealing but for gay men always open to homophobic (mis)interpretation, as a sign of self-hatred.

(Ross, 1998, 15)

It is not just choosing against suicide which is seen as an act of defiance against the homophobia that ultimately would desire one's non-existence (and into whose hands one's

self eradication would play), but it is the writing itself, which makes visible one's seropositivity or one's homosexuality, that has a political significance; or otherwise stated: "the writing of AIDS does not deny the stigma of homophobia, then, so much as it assumes this stigma by 'choosing AIDS' while transforming its valency, making it an instrument of oppositionality." (Ibid. 28). With *À l'ami*, Guibert made one choice against suicide. With *Le Protocole compassionnel*, this choice is made yet again, and this time it is with a greater awareness of his expanded audience, as readers, and those who watched his appearance on *Apostrophes*, wrote to him following the publication of *À l'ami*.

Chambers focuses on the reader's relationship to AIDS diaries, and his corpus includes Guibert's video diary *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur*. The texts studied in this thesis are works of autofiction, and bear similarities to our expectations of diaries: they offer a more or less true account of Guibert's experience, with certain events that can be corroborated by his diaries or accounts in interviews; they chart the dying body, as AIDS diaries do; they are also not ordered by plot as much as they are ordered by Guibert's impressions or feelings, meaning that the texts form a highly reflective and personalised narrative. Additionally, the diaries which Chambers looks at were, as he himself notes, intended for publication (Ibid. ix). They are very personal but simultaneously produced with the awareness of a future audience; these are not journals found after an author's death, but works which an author chooses to make public. In addition to this, one can argue that *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur* is as much of a constructed autofiction as the texts examined here, particularly as it includes a faked and therefore fictionalised suicide attempt (MAU 532). For these reasons, the decision to write these texts can be viewed in the same way as the decision to publish an AIDS diary; Guibert is using the texts to express his experience, even if they are not purely autobiographical.

Critics of Guibert would likely question whether his own work could class as the anti-homophobic practice Chamber's quote suggests. Frédéric Martel records how Guibert's treatment of AIDS in his works, which focuses on its individual meaning for him, was often viewed as unhelpful or even harmful to AIDS activist movements: "Ces militants refusent



l'épopée individuelle, tant ils sont conscients du supplice collectif qu'ils subissent," (Martel, 1996, 322). Martel also quotes Philippe Mangeot, former chairman of the activist group ACT UP<sup>7</sup>:

Je suis venu à Act Up contre Hervé Guibert [...] Pour Guibert, le sida est le meilleur scénario possible pour l'homosexualité, le sida est programmé, il est une épiphanie. [...] Tout cela a suscité chez moi un vrai dégoût. Guibert me raconte qu'un bon pédé est un pédé mort : moi, j'ai besoin d'autres fictions.

(Ibid., 338).

More recently, Mangeot clarified his discomfort to the media's response enabled by Guibert's work: "C'était le vieux schéma sacrificiel de la victime consentante autour de laquelle la communauté peut se reconstituer, comme font les familles aux enterrements." (Chémery et al., 2018). These comments suggest that Guibert's attitude, in his work or otherwise, actually plays into the hands of a homophobic society, or at the very least does not galvanise effective action, which was needed at the time. Although this chapter will go on to examine positive or powerful aspects of Guibert's presentation of the body with AIDS in the 'Spectacle' section of this chapter, it cannot presume to offer a comprehensive guide for 'correct' or helpful portrayals of AIDS in this focused study. The highly individualistic and literary rather than documentarian approach of Guibert's work means that these texts would certainly not be the most palatable to activists; Guibert's texts are not manifestos and are more interested in exploring ideas which interested him already, such as death or truth, than they are in being political. In the aspects of his texts which come closest to criticising institutions, such as his treatment in hospitals or Bill's betrayal, where the latter can be partially read as metonymic of the drug manufacturing industry, any anger in Guibert's texts is ultimately directed at individuals; the framing of *À l'ami*, for instance, with its title, in the form of a dedication, taking aim at the personal betrayal of a friend, and the direct address to Bill at the end of the text, "Pends-toi Bill!" (AMI 284), centres an individual grievance over an institutional attack. Even so, at least so far as the corpus of this thesis is concerned, "un bon pédé est un pédé

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<sup>7</sup> AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, founded in New York, with chapters worldwide.

mort” is not an effective summary. There is a certain defiance to Guibert’s texts against anything that would reduce him to any particular role. As will be later discussed, he is aware of perceptions of him, including the negative and voyeuristic, and his writing often works to subvert that gaze. Moreover, the literary appeal of AIDS is an insufficient motivator. Boulé briefly tempts us with the idea that “the news that he has AIDS is welcomed almost as a godsend by the narrator” for its literary merits and the way in which it can benefit the development of Guibert’s writing, but quickly tells us that,

[...] this ‘salut par la littérature’ (‘salvation by literature’) is a delusion...[...] This idea would chime with one of the interpretations of the title: the friend who did not save my life is my book. [...] The book’s last fragment brings back to mind that it is the narrator who has been deluded by the narrative which has closed on him like a trap, just as the vaccine had perhaps only been an illusion.

(Boulé, 1999, 200)

If writing is viewed in terms of certain failure, what is in it for the author, besides using it to abstain from or delay his own suicide? What is written may not offer solace, but it may also be a “compagnon” (AMI 12) wherein an author can purge himself of experiences. In this case, it is the process of writing which is important, even if the author does not have ultimate control over the significance of the text. Ultimately though, Guibert in particular, writes because he is a writer. Regardless of whether AIDS provides him with a new literary avenue to explore, or whether it spurs him on to write due to the approach of death (73-74), it is writing’s centrality to his life which also overcomes the obstructions of AIDS; both texts chart periods of inactivity in Guibert’s writing, linked to his condition, where a return to his text becomes a return to his desired state (or as close to it as he can get). Guibert talked on *Apostrophes* about how he initially wanted to keep himself distanced from writing about AIDS, saying, “Pendant des années j’ai voulu tenir ce mot ‘sida’ le plus loin de moi possible,” but, as it becomes part of his existence, he cannot abstain from writing about it.

Having chosen to write, the writer with AIDS faces the realities of writing. Whilst the fear of death, the homophobic pressure to remain silent and unseen, or the author’s actual death can hinder or cut off the production of writing, the still living body can also function as a deterrent.

The body is written about, certainly, but its ability to function in some capacity is essential for the very existence of writing: the texts depend on Guibert sitting down and exerting energy and time to produce them. As the body becomes an obstacle to performing simple tasks, it makes startlingly apparent the extent to which writing is beholden to the body. Guibert sometimes centres this struggle in the moment of writing, as when he discusses writing and fatigue. “Le livre lutte avec la fatigue qui se crée de la lutte du corps contre les assauts du virus [...] Ce livre qui raconte ma fatigue me la fait oublier.” (AMI 69-70). Writing offers a form of resistance to AIDS, whether through the decision to live in order to write, or as an emotional support, but it can simultaneously be seen to work alongside AIDS, as it worsens his state of fatigue; the function of writing is therefore compromised by his body. Nonetheless, the option of inactivity to preserve energy is not a solution, as Guibert’s body is subject to the effects of AIDS in any case; giving up writing would also be giving in to his fatigue, so that while the process of writing lasts, at least, he can be seen to fight against the limits of his body. Guibert is aware too in this scene of the virus’ potential of having invaded his head and thus writing: “mon cerveau, menacé par l’intrusion du virus dès que la petite ceinture aura cédé,” (70); just before this, he makes physical his writing by stating the link to his brain: “chaque phrase arrachée de mon cerveau,”(70) reiterating the body’s role in his writing.

Guibert’s physical condition is worse by the events in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, and therefore there are more examples of him not writing either due to physical constraints themselves or his deteriorating condition resulting in a loss of hope. He remarks, for instance, how “Je n’ai pas assez de muscles pour rester longtemps assis, pour écrire,” (PC 160) in a section of writing comparing his frailty to that of his soon to be 95 year old great-aunt Suzanne. The limitations caused by his frailty can furthermore be seen in his inability to easily get out of bed: he references the fact that were he to fall out of bed at night, he would likely have great difficulties in getting himself back up (45), and there is also a scene, explored later on in this chapter, in which he ‘writes’ his novel whilst doing physiotherapy exercises in bed. Both these scenes illustrate that Guibert does not have the freedom to simply leap out of bed and write,

and there are times when certain activities, such as his exercises, are prioritised, since these are what, in a practical sense, are enabling him to continue writing through the development of his strength. As concerns his energy, there is a moment where a brief recuperation of strength allows him to write after a period of stopping: “J’étais de nouveau vivant. J’écrivais de nouveau. Je bandais de nouveau.” (64). The juxtaposition of these sentences suffuses writing with virility and arousal. Their ordering could suggest writing as the origin of pleasure, although the listing can more generally show writing as a facet of his physical wellbeing; it is one of the reasons he feels alive again. Such bursts of energy cannot be relied upon, however, and in contrast, we saw in the last chapter how, before Guibert has access to DDI, writing is something he has to force himself to do as part of his routine “Je me forçai à réécrire chaque matin, et parfois l’après-midi après la sieste, je le faisais sans plaisir” (197).

The decision to write is made with the knowledge of death, and the presence of the writing process reminds reader and author of this position, as it involves an ongoing struggle against a weakening body. AIDS and the body encroach on writing in a practical sense as well as through subject matter, and this study will now turn to consider the ways in which Guibert navigates that intrusion in his writing.

### The body in the text

Up to this point, this chapter has tried to show why Guibert might be seen to write about AIDS, and to establish the physical aspect of writing. This section takes a brief detour from more theoretical implications of the body and writing into closer textual analysis, in order to further consider how Guibert’s texts are made corporeal; that is, how the body is brought into writing and how the two are closely intertwined. The body is frequently a topic of writing in both texts, but a description of the body alone does not necessarily make the physical aspect of the text tangible. Guibert writes about the body but he also incorporates a certain physicality into the texts.

The first way in which this is achieved is through Guibert's adoption of physical characteristics to describe his texts. The two examples to be initially looked at, concern invasions of the text (or body). The last chapter included an examination of a passage (AMI 231-232) in which Guibert employs the images of both HIV and cancer to describe the influence of Thomas Bernhard's work on his own writing: "la métastase bernhardienne s'est propagée à la vitesse grand V dans mes tissus et mes reflexes vitaux d'écriture, elle la phagocyte, elle l'absorbe, la captive, en détruit tout naturel et toute personnalité pour étendre sur elle sa domination ravageuse." (AMI 232).

The passage is notable for the mix of a proliferation of medical information about Guibert's worsening condition with an unwieldy syntax, as he all the while proclaims his need to rid himself of this style, just as he wants to rid himself of HIV. Guibert calculates—and this calculation is one he does literally, as he draws the reader's attention to the act of writing he is currently, physically, undertaking: "(je fais la soustraction au bas de cette page)" (232)—the likelihood of his plummeting T-cells soon rendering him ineligible for treatment with the Mockney vaccine, and reminds the reader of the option of suicide through an overdose of Digitaline: "le seuil catastrophique [referring to T-cell level] qui devrait être reculé par l'absorption d'AZT si je le préfère à la Digitaline," (232). He inserts this information into the framework of a Bernhardian style in such a way that it even interrupts the self-reflective nature of what he is writing, causing him to return to and reform the thought he began in his opening clause ("parallèlement donc au virus HIV...etc." (232)). This is a highly effective execution of Guibert's apparent loss of control over his body as well as over his writing, because the interruption of the initial thought is one that both demonstrates the progression of the HIV virus through his body in content, as well as the progress of the Bernhardian 'virus' through the ever-expanding syntax; this strengthens the surface level comparison of the body and the text. This idea is continued through a flurry of pathological descriptions of the literary metastasis's effects on his writing, "elle la phagocyte, elle l'absorbe, la captive," the reiteration of which serves both to highlight the all-consuming effect on his writing through the drawn-

out image of a cell being destroyed, and to again demonstrate this process through an asyndetic style which inflates the sentence.

Guibert use of terminology is inconsistent. He compares Bernhard's influence on his writing to HIV, and yet also refers to a "métastase bernhardienne" which is associated with cancer; he furthermore employs "chimiothérapie" (232) to describe AZT, again using a term commonly associated with cancer in the context of HIV/AIDS. If he had limited himself to terminology of either one of the HIV virus or of cancer, it would be easier to definitively state whether Guibert views the influence of his style as an extension of the effects of HIV on his body and his writing, or whether he wishes to distinguish the change in his writing from the changes in his body caused by HIV. Since this distinction is not made, there are two main ways to approach the language in this passage. The first is to view it as working against the lack of a full lexicon to describe the workings and effects of HIV. Whilst Guibert's texts are filled with medical jargon pertaining to HIV and AIDS, he is writing within a historical context in which knowledge and medical advancements around the virus and its progression were still in the early stages. It follows that some of its effects may therefore be understood or expressed through the existing medical language framework of a known illness, which may similarly be seen to take over the body, and which is often terminal. Ralph Sarkonak observes in his own analysis of this passage how AIDS was referred to as a "gay cancer." (Sarkonak, 204); Susan Sontag also outlines how the emergence of AIDS saw it adopt a position previously occupied by cancer in the public consciousness: "For several generations now, the generic idea of death has been a death from cancer [...] Now the generic rebuke to life and to hope is AIDS." (Sontag, 109) and later, "AIDS has banalized cancer." (Ibid. 130) This framework might be seen as another way in which the writer with AIDS lacks control not only over their own body, but over an adequate expression of it. The second approach, which can be viewed in conjunction with the first, is to direct more focus onto the full picture of the effects that Guibert is trying to convey. This is not to completely ignore the nuances of different metaphors of illness, or the deliberate choice of a precise specialist term like "métastase". Instead, it

acknowledges that, as in the case of an earlier comparison in the novel between AIDS and Pacman (AMI 13-14), Guibert is homing in on images that communicate particular effects, without needing to commit to a definitive metaphor. His writing, as he sees it, is being invaded by an alien force, which grows and spreads through it like a cancer, and whose metastasis is not dissimilar to the progression of the HIV which attacks and takes over his body. These ideas need not contradict one another. The point made is one of control that presents writing in terms of the (ill or infected) body.

An invasion into writing is not necessarily unwelcome. Guibert opens one section of *Le Protocole compassionnel* with the statement: “C’est le DDI du danseur mort, avec le Prozac, qui écrit mon livre à ma place” (PC 99). Before attempting to show the ways in which this can be viewed both positively and negatively, it is worth establishing how this sentence links the body and writing. A useful reference to begin this illustration is Lawrence Schehr’s examination of the signs of the gay AIDS-infected body, wherein alongside the widely recognised image of the body of a PWA<sup>8</sup> wasting away, or, otherwise stated “the gay body shrink[ing] like some latter day *peau de chagrin*” he observes the “various medical attachments and procedures appended to the body.” (Schehr, 1997, 20) That is, the body incorporates into itself the medical processes it undergoes, including medication and its effects on the body, positive or negative. DDI and Prozac are taken into the body and become part of it; as a result, they enter the text, since it is the body that writes it. Both drugs could also be argued to be reasons that the text is being written in the first place: the DDI fights against the progression of AIDS towards death, and the Prozac, as antidepressant, is intended to ward off the suicide that would destroy the body in its own way. The inclusion of an antidepressant also throws up the idea of the mind, as we are reminded that seemingly intangible concepts such as emotions can be rendered as physiological. It is by no means an original point, but we are brought back to the question of the body’s control over thoughts; to what extent might one’s creative output be moulded by the effects of medication or illness on the body? A particularly

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<sup>8</sup> Person(s) with AIDS

literal example of the altered brain is explored by Chambers in his examination of Pascal de Duve's AIDS diary *Cargo Vie*:

[...] in Duve's case the symptoms declared themselves at an already advanced stage, through evidence that the virus had crossed the blood-brain barrier and was already in the process of destroying his brain cells. There is thus something almost literal in his belief that it is the virus, not he, that is doing the writing: 'Minuscules petites bestioles, liguées par millions, vous occupez mon cerveau et vous vous en occupez. Mais avec quelle flamboyance!'

(Chambers, 1998, 14).

This brings us onto the question of whether the invasion of one's writing can be viewed positively. For Chambers, Duve presents AIDS "...as productive of a language that is itself like Duve's brain, richly *parasité*," (Ibid.). The observation of AIDS as "productive" in terms of language provides a very useful contrast to the earlier example of the "métastase bernhardienne" which utilised a semantic field of medical terms to illustrate a destructive and domineering influence on writing. Whilst that example was only using the body as a metaphor, and we are at this point concerned with the literal body's effect on writing, both present writing as a mutable organism; the difference lies in whether the writer can gain something from the process of change.

In Guibert's case, the idea of writing under the influence of drugs, something he has not done before, seems to intrigue him: "ça me fait quelque chose de savoir que ce sont des substances chimiques qui écrivent un livre" (PC 99). Furthermore when talking about his writer friend's experiences with writing on drugs, he offhandedly suggests "Je soupçonne que les spectacles de Téo ont été moins inspirés le jour où il a cessé de prendre des amphétamines" (100). 'Offhandedly', because Guibert does not greatly develop any particular theory on whether drugs improve the writing process, remaining content with simply toying with it as an idea or experiment; regardless of the outcome of his writing, the thought of DDI or Prozac doing his writing is interesting to him. As with Duve's "bestioles", there is the potential for this invading force, which is now part of the body's make-up, to produce a different type of writing to what has come before. It could be argued that unlike those of the progressive destruction of brain



cells or other deteriorating effects of AIDS, the effects of a drug may be reversed by simply not taking it; we know too, that Guibert only has a finite amount of DDI: “il y en a pour trois semaines” (110). The distinction is certainly valid, as the author can be seen to have a different level of agency and hence of control over the writing process in each circumstance. However, Guibert’s agency is limited, because the lack of DDI is out of his control, and, if he wants to keep writing, he will be dependent on medication that attempts to ward off death. Furthermore, if we refer back to Schehr’s argument about the various medical appendages of the ill body, we can see that the writing process will remain altered by everything that has heretofore affected his body and everything that will continue to affect it, whether that is drugs or the progression of AIDS.

A final example to illustrate how the texts are presented in terms of the body is the abundance of blood coursing through them. Guibert, in *Le Protocole compassionnel* describes the inherent pleasure of writing bathed in blood:

Est-ce que vous supportez un récit avec autant de sang ? Vincent m’a dit : « Forcément, ton livre a du succès, les gens aiment le malheur des autres. » Maintenant j’aime les livres pleins de sang, il faudrait que ça coule en rigoles, que ça fasse des nappes, des lacs, des piscines, que ça inonde le texte.

(123)

The confrontational nature of the passage here can be viewed as a partial response to the reader’s voyeurism. The rhetorical address to the reader is followed up with a view that would seem to confirm the pleasure a reader can gain from the misfortune of others. The expectation of the reader’s pleasure is one which Guibert builds to excess with a proliferation of increasingly large bodies of water (or blood): from those people willingly enter, such as lakes and swimming pools, to the image of a flood that forces its way in and overwhelms. It is not the only place where it does so. References to blood proliferate throughout *À l’ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*, largely in a medical context, as when he updates us on his T-cell count or describes the blood tests he has to undergo. The medical context does not make these descriptions clinical, however. The last chapter discussed how Guibert’s description of his

journey to the Claude-Bernard hospital was consistently interrupted by prolepsis to the blood tests themselves. In particular, there is a reoccurrence of blood imagery, which reflects the traumatic effect of the medical procedure through Guibert's focus on an exaggerated quantity of blood taken from him. "On me ponctionna une quantité abominable de sang" (AMI 51) becomes "me faire soutirer une quantité astronomique de sang" which is immediately followed by an amplification of :

[...] voler mon sang dans cet institut public aux fins de je ne sais quelles expériences, et lui ôter en même temps de ses dernières forces valides, sous le prétexte de contrôler le nombre de T4 que le virus avait massacré en un mois dans mon sang, de capturer une dose supplémentaire de mes réserves vitales pour les envoyer au chercheurs, les transformer en matière désactivée d'un vaccin qui sauvera les autres, d'une gammaglobuline, ou pour en infecter un singe de laboratoire...(52)

In addition to the focus on the amount of blood taken from him, Guibert increasingly frames himself as being preyed upon through his choice of verbs: "me faire soutirer" describes a much more forceful squeezing out of blood in contrast to the slightly more detached siphoning of "ponctionna", as if they are wringing out every last drop; "voler" and "capturer" place the medical staff not merely in opposition to Guibert but as malefactors to his victim. The semantic field of scientific terminology seen with "matière désactivée" or "gammaglobuline", further place Guibert on the same level as a lab rat, or monkey; he is a specimen to be examined and experimented on. Guibert takes the uncertainty and ignorance of the patient with regards to the workings of medical tests ("aux fins de je ne sais quelles expériences") and imagines a scenario where tests carried out in the interests of his health are in fact a front for the medical establishment's own devices. In the timeline of the events of the novel, Guibert knows that a T-cell level below 300 places the vaccine trials out of his reach (210), and thus the image of his blood tests being used as a vaccine to save others is a grim acknowledgement that he will likely die before science has progressed enough to have been able to save him. There is no stoic pride in the prospect of others being saved, as the image of a vaccine is followed by one of infecting a monkey with HIV; Guibert is focusing on the expendability of his own blood or body, as with that of a monkey, in the scientific process. The medical procedure dehumanises

him. Later on in the passage, the vibrancy of “mon sang chaud et noir” (53) ekes its horror from the visceral nature of a life force extracted from his body; the focus on the senses through the colour and especially the heat of the blood, arouses the image of the slayed prey about to be consumed. In fact, he goes on to liken himself to a slaughtered animal: “j’avais envie de courir, de courir comme jamais, à l’abattoir chevalin la bête qu’on vient de saigner au cou, sanglée sous les flancs, continue de galoper, dans le vide” (58). The stakes of life or death transform the procedure from a simple, clinical blood test into a savage attack, if not its own form of murder.

Blood is certainly linked to trauma and holds a great confrontational potential in its excess, but it is not just a device to shock. Blood is naturally associated with HIV/AIDS, as one of the bodily fluids capable of transmitting HIV, and its inclusion in the text on one level brings the reader in closest proximity, without risk of infection, to Guibert’s experience with AIDS. More generally, blood may be associated with violence, but it is also associated with life, from the womb to the heart which continuously pumps blood through the body. In this vein, Guibert describes himself, Jules, Berthe and the children (suspected of having contracted HIV) as constituting “un corps unique absolument solidaire” (AMI 213). Although in one sense their bodies are linked by likely seropositivity, Guibert does not frame this shared body in a negative light. The context for this quotation is Bill explaining one possibility of using antibodies from a seronegative person to manufacture a vaccine, and Guibert balking at the idea of accepting anyone else’s body into his own; the union between the five of them is the only one he cares about, and “absolument solidaire” indicates the strong, loving bond between them. As blood presents a binary between life and death, so too do Guibert’s texts, as we are constantly aware of the author who is at once living and dying. The text and the body remain very much linked, with blood serving as another example of the texts being infused with the physical, as well as demonstrating how much of Guibert’s life and his writing is understood and produced in the context of the body.

The above examples have looked at the parallels between the body and the text in order to show how AIDS creates this new physical context in which the text and its production are understood. The following will look closely at a couple of passages in which physical actions are woven into the text, and consider the implications of these for Guibert's writing process. During one of his stays in Italy, Guibert constructs his novel from under a mosquito net. He is not writing it; the physical demands of writing and Guibert's inability to easily get out of bed in the middle of the night can be seen as a backdrop to this scene, where, instead of writing, Guibert is engaging in physiotherapy exercises and thinking his novel into existence:

[J]'écris mon livre, à blanc. [...] Et j'écris mon livre dans le vide, je le bâtis, le rééquilibre, pense à son rythme général et aux brisures de ses articulations, à ses ruptures et à ses continuités, à l'entremêlement de ses trames, à sa vivacité, j'écris mon livre sans papier ni stylo sous le chapiteau de la moustiquaire, jusqu'à l'oubli.

(PC 174-175)

The sentence itself mimics the act of constructing a piece of writing, through the amplification of each successive clause; within this, the multiple references to rhythm and the stops and starts of his text similarly conjure the image of Guibert thinking over and drafting his text. The semantic field of emptiness conveyed through "à blanc", "vide" and "jusqu'à l'oubli", reflects an *ex nihilo* creative process, as writing constructs itself into being. The use of present tense mean that this could be interpreted as referring to a habitual occurrence, that therefore conveys changing habits caused by the limits of his body. There are, however, details such as a mosquito butting up against the net (175) which create a sense of immediacy and increase the proximity between the event and the reader. But the reader is left in the dark as to what he is actually constructing. The text presented to the reader has been written in another place at another point in time when Guibert had occasion to write or type out this scene, and the scene which is written out here is one describing the 'writing' process. That is to say, the reader is not given examples of what other scenes Guibert may be 'writing' into the dark, which he may or may not later transcribe. To bring the reader close to these exercises and the process of 'writing' from under the mosquito net, Guibert physically writes it down, but in doing so, he makes the reader aware of the absence of that process and the material that he created during

it. Therefore, whilst his 'writing' can be viewed as a creative process, it is still an interruption to his regular writing practice.

Nevertheless this process is productive to the creation of his text, as it is adapted into a scene. Accompanying it are his exercises, which involve the repeated movements of different parts of his body, required to help them function properly; the physical act of writing is in this instance replaced with another, but this act is necessary in order for Guibert to have the strength to continue writing elsewhere. The exercises and the writing are not necessarily in opposition, as they are both processes which see him moving and writing against death. The section ends with "Je lutte. Mon Dieu que cette lutte est belle." (175), which suggests that, rather than focusing on what he is fighting against or the inevitable outcome of his death, it is the process that is foregrounded and valorised. Guibert has focused in this scene on what he is creating to fill the emptiness or oblivion around him; likewise, invoking God here could bring to mind oblivion, but Guibert is using it to express wonder that is focused on his 'lutte'. This passage and its conclusion reflect the narrowing of Guibert's sphere of control to such processes, which represent his ongoing survival, even against an inevitable defeat.

There is pleasure too in the process of exercising and of the writing that replaces physical pleasure in other forms, such as sex. Guibert imbues his descriptions with sensual and sexual imagery: "j'écarte mes cuisses et mes bras le plus possible, je m'ouvre, je me casse, mes muscles me chauffent doucement, ils fourmillent de vie, ils me donnent dorénavant plus de plaisir que l'éjaculation routinière sans imaginations neuves," (175). His body becomes an object pushed to breaking point. From the descriptions of the stretching and spreading of limbs, of opening up or breaking oneself, emerges the image of the sexual activity that his exercises (and his words) are currently replacing; the pleasure of his muscles swarming with life, is contrasted to "l'éjaculation routinière", suggesting that this replacement is not especially disheartening. Breaking this down further, we can say that the switch from the first person up to "je me casse" to the third person plural "ils" shows how the exercises bring his body to life. In response to his manipulations, his muscles reciprocate with heat and pleasure,

and so become the grammatical subject. Furthermore, through the verb “fourmillent”, they are likened to an infestation, with life as the invading force. This creation of life, or of something new easily usurps monotonous masturbatory fantasies; Guibert’s use of the plural in “sans imaginations neuves” suggests a repeated routine that is in opposition to the pleasure gained from the exercises, and indeed, from his own writing and creating.

Sex, or the lack of it, intersects with the writing process at various points in both texts. A reference to writing splits the description of a sexual encounter with Jules in *À l’ami*, when Guibert writes: “Ecrire cela aujourd’hui si loin de lui refait bander mon sexe, désactivé et inerte depuis des semaines.” (AMI 165). Writing cuts through a sex scene, but the writing itself then arouses, bringing sex back into the writing process. At the same time, Guibert makes clear his distance from the scene in question, and any other sexual encounter or even solitary arousal through the clause “désactivé et inerte depuis des semaines”. “Désactivé et inerte” is contrasted with the fairly desperate encounter described, where the physical is pushed into pain or violence: “je réattachais ses tétons, et lui rapidement, mécaniquement, s’agenouilla devant moi [...] me suppliant [...] de lui redonner ma chair, en délivrance de la meurtrissure que je lui imposais.” (165). Both can however be linked to AIDS. The sex scene described is in response to Jules’ fear of going blind as a result of AIDS, and their sex is more generally shadowed by the spectre of their seropositivity<sup>9</sup>. Guibert’s own apparent lack of libido could also be linked to his seropositivity, as his dwindling interest in or capability of having sex is remarked upon as the texts develop, and by the beginning of *Le Protocole compassionnel* he states: “je n’ai plus aucune idée sexuelle.” (PC 13). This aversion can be linked to fear, no longer of infection, but of their own mortality, as Guibert notes that “il n’y avait plus rien à risquer qu’une recontamination réciproque, mais le virus se dressait entre nos corps comme un spectre qui les repoussait” (AMI 164). More humorously, in *Le protocole compassionnel* he juxtaposes the acts of Jules cutting off his ponytail and beginning to have sex again: “Il s’était servi de cette queue de cheval, en fait, comme barrage aux attirances qu’il pouvait

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<sup>9</sup> See ‘The Unsayable’

susciter, terrorisé à l'idée d'avoir des rapports sexuels.” (PC 43); couched in gentle ribbing at Jules' style choices, the fear or even trauma now associated with sex almost passes unnoticed, though it is shown to underpin the most banal of actions. It follows from this that it is in the solitary, controlled activity of writing that Guibert is able to resuscitate his virility. Writing itself may be rendered masturbatory, as in the opening section of *Le Protocole compassionnel*, a long sentence in which Guibert describes the near-cartoonish excess of the last time he masturbated: “j’ai dû mettre les deux mains, ça faisait des semaines et des semaines que je n’avais pas joui et j’ai été étonné de l’abondance séminale qui redonnait soudain à mon corps une pulsion juvénile.” (PC 13-14). As, not long after this description, he claims that “je n’écrivais plus jusqu’à ce jour” (14) the reader can easily draw the parallel to writing, and view this long gasp of an opening sentence as its own “abondance”, which follows a long period of inactivity. Unlike sex, however, writing is something that Guibert is able to fully recapture.

Guibert does not abstain from sex, in the sense that he does not restrain himself from having it, out of, for instance, fear of passing on HIV. Nor is his lack of sexual activity entirely due to fear or trauma triggered by his diagnosis, although as we have seen here and will come back to in the next chapter on ‘The Unsayable’, these do play a part. Lack of sex can also result from the state of being ill, whether through fatigue, physical weakness or the side-effects of the drugs one has to take. Sex is brought into Guibert's writing even as the desire for it leaves his own body, and will therefore only exist for him in his texts. Unlike the incorporation of the exercises, which highlighted a focus on processes, the relationship of sex to writing is less distinctive; at times it could be argued to be a substitute, as he continues to write but stops having sex, but at others it seems like Guibert's interests lie elsewhere. In his recounting of Jules' rekindled sex life in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, Guibert emphasises that his happiness at Jules' experiences does not stem from an ability to live vicariously through him (PC 43), which would suggest that, whilst writing may be a substitute for sex, Guibert is not bitter or frustrated about this. Guibert similarly reflects on an evening he spends with Vincent: “Je

connaissais son corps par cœur. Il s'était imprimé à l'intérieur de mes doigts, je n'en avais plus besoin pour de vrai." (165). The image of the body imprinted shows an ownership of the physical even in the absence of touching; a physical sensation created through writing. Moreover, the specification of "à l'intérieur" suggests that Vincent's body has been absorbed into his own; and whilst one can be said to know something by heart, in this context, the reference to an internal organ associated with emotions renders the connection to Vincent more than skin deep. Whilst the physical can certainly be recreated in the space of writing, it is also true to say that the memory of it lingers in Guibert. His assessment of having "aucune idée sexuelle" (PC 13) is perhaps not strictly accurate; Guibert's lack of libido and sexual relations does not mean that sex ceases to be part of his experience, as his writing becomes rich with the body and (the memory of) sex, seeking pleasure in the expression of what is now physically absent.

This section has demonstrated the physical dimension of writing in the texts, through an examination of how the text is transformed into the body and how the body is brought close to the text. The presence of AIDS deepens the relationship between writing and the body, firstly because it shifts the context in which one's world is understood, so that writing can be viewed in terms of infected blood or the destruction of cells, and secondly, because it highlights the new aspect that writing gains as a result of loss in other areas, as for instance when sex only exists in writing. Writing is at once a tool of control in the face of, and directly affected and limited by, AIDS: so Guibert is for example able to bring writing into an experience where his physical condition meant he could not physically write, as is the case for the scene where he 'writes' under the mosquito net. The body remains central as the source and a subject of writing; its incorporation into the fabric of the text ensures that the writing takes on a physical texture which foregrounds the importance of the body more generally, and the body with AIDS more specifically, to Guibert's work.



## Spectacle

With HIV, the body does not present physical markers unless it develops into AIDS, through the progression of which the body reaches a point where it begins to waste away. In the two texts we move from Guibert's initial question of "Est-ce que ça se voit dans les yeux?" (AMI 14) near the beginning of *À l'ami*, at which stage his fear of exposure is only imagined, to the points in *Le Protocole compassionnel* where he becomes "le cadavre ambulante" (131). Any degenerative illness can display visible signs, but, as Sontag explains: "AIDS is understood in a premodern way, as a disease incurred by people both as individuals and as members of a 'risk-group'—that neutral-sounding, bureaucratic, category which also revives the archaic idea of a tainted community that illness has judged." (Sontag, 132). The gaze of others is therefore imbued with aspects such as homophobia, racism, the negative sentiment towards intravenous drug users or sex workers. It is not just that the body with AIDS is made into a spectacle through its visible symptoms, as contingent upon the progression of AIDS or related conditions, but that the body of those of a particular community is made into an object of scrutiny through its association, actual or imagined, with AIDS. We see this, for instance, with the use of terms like "gay plague" during the AIDS crisis, and myths about the straight population being unable to contract it. In addition to this societal framing, the body with HIV or AIDS, as it is ill, becomes subject to medical examination and treatments. This section examines the issue of the spectacle and its possible subversion. It considers the physical markers of the dying body, alongside Guibert's and others' reactions to his own, the sense of exposure to voyeurism, and, finally, the medical gaze and power relations between patient and medical institutions and its presentation to the reader.

### **i). The dying body**

Most of the descriptions pertaining to Guibert's emaciated body occur in *Le Protocole compassionnel* when Guibert's AIDS has progressed to a greater extent. He talks about being

a “cadavre ambulante” (131) and a “squelette” (105) and views himself as an old man, categorising himself with and sitting alongside the old “monstres” (239) in Casablanca, and citing his actual age as being closer to eighty (104) or ninety-five (161). That latter figure emerges from the passage mentioned in an earlier section, in which he compares his frailties to those of his great-aunt Suzanne, including signs of incontinence “Mon slip, dont Claudette Dumouchel a soulevé l’élastique, est maculé d’éclats de diarrhée et d’urine, comme ces taches de merde sur le drap de lit de Suzanne que Louise s’emploie à me dissimuler quand elle a suffisamment de force dans le bras pour tirer par-dessus un autre drap.” (160). Guibert is at once an outsider, viewing the ways in which the elderly body becomes shameful, the evidence of its incontinence needing to be hidden away from Guibert, whilst also being aware of his own body mimicking these indignities. The reference to Claudette lifting the elastic of his underwear recalls the examination discussed in the previous chapter in which Guibert talks of specially choosing his best underwear for her (126). As mentioned then, Guibert’s presentation of their relationship is highly flirtatious, and it is no less so here, as the image of underwear being pulled to the side, although medical in purpose, simultaneously holds sexual connotations. At the same time, it is a past image transplanted into a passage discussing the aches and pains of debility, with the stains on his underwear evidence of his condition worsening since the referenced examination. His body is also associated, in both texts, with Auschwitz, whether in reference to his emaciated form (AMI 53; PC 18-19, 128) or to the apparent brutality of medical institutions, such as when his traumatic first encounter with the Claude-Bernard hospital reminds him of his visit to Dachau, or when he refers to an unsympathetic doctor’s “physique de sadique de nazi” (PC 69). The references to the Holocaust also reflect the omnipresence of death residing in the body with AIDS. Whilst the use of the nickname “Bébé-Auschwitz” (PC 128) may suggest a degree of control over the association of his body with that of a prisoner at Auschwitz, for the most part, these descriptions are an expression of Guibert’s dread of the death that is now inherent in his body and which is made visible through extreme loss of weight and faculties.

At one point, the extent of his weight loss is inverted into an image of cannibalism, a need to consume the flesh of others. Sex and eating are linked in a passage which parallels Guibert's lack of appetite for food or sex, with "dans mon cul et dans ma bouche ce vide que je n'ai plus envie de combler" (PC 106). He counteracts this seeming lack of desire with a hunger for the flesh of others to fill him up.

Quand je vois le beau corps dénudé charnu d'un ouvrier sur un chantier, je n'aurais pas seulement envie de lécher, mais de mordre, de bouffer, de croquer, de mastiquer, d'avalier. Je ne découperais pas à la mode japonaise un de ces ouvriers pour le tasser dans mon congélateur, je voudrais manger la chair crue et vibrante, chaude, douce et infecte.

(106)

"Lecher" and even "mordre" can function as descriptions of eating or of sexual activity, before the subsequent three verbs transform the initial image into explicit cannibalism, relishing the act of consumption through the semantic field of verbs relating to different aspects of eating. Similarly, attraction to a body is made sinister with the use of the adjective "charnu" which is often used to describe ripe fruit. It is unsurprising that Guibert shuns the refrigeration of neatly packaged meat, preferring to rip into his flesh straight from the source. His choice of adjectives is reminiscent of the visceral detail given of the blood drawn from him in *À l'ami* ("chaud et noir" (AMI 53)), with "vibrant" and "chaud" in particular conveying the life force of an organism just slain, or even still living. The contrast in "douce et infecte" suggests a mix of pleasure and revulsion, but, whilst it may be the most jarring in context, Guibert does not end the sentence with the sweetness or mildness denoted by "douce", choosing instead to highlight the vile, quasi-paraphilic aspect of this hunger. A similarity could be drawn between this cannibalistic image and the nickname "Bébé-Auschwitz". Both employ horrific imagery to present Guibert's extreme weight loss, but, in the extremity of their imagery or associations, they seek out a morbid sense of ownership over the horror of the emaciated figure. In the case of cannibalism, Guibert positions himself as a monstrous aggressor to subvert the image of wasting away into one of ravenous consumption. Shocking and confrontational imagery is framed with a similar familiarity to his nickname, for instance through the reference to a

refrigerator, or earlier in the passage where he casually states “je deviendrais volontiers cannibale”. Guibert is not a victim, it seems, although his subversion of that view of him perhaps does not go far enough, as he is not reframing his body away from horror.

The external signs of the body are out of one’s control. We see this for instance when, following his appearance on *Apostrophes*, Guibert writes in *Le Protocole compassionnel* about how he is described by a journalist as “ce mourant” (44). Guibert says: “On me disait mourant quand je me sentais bien, et quand je me sentais à l’article de la mort on me disait : « Vous ne trouvez pas que vous exagérez un tout petit peu ? »” (Ibid.). Whilst this observation is framed humorously, through the antithesis between Guibert’s own feelings and external perceptions, as well as the patronising tone of the unspecified interlocutor, it reveals the lack of control that Guibert has over how he is perceived, and specifically, the lack of control over his own body and what it communicates to others. It is perhaps due to this lack of control and this hypervisibility of the body with AIDS, that Guibert considers filming the other “cadavres ambulants” at the hospital to be “un vrai scandale, un scandale inintéressant” (PC 55). The images may be shocking in the same way that images of Auschwitz are shocking, but the presentation of the bodies in this case would do nothing to subvert what society already associates with AIDS. “Inintéressant” highlights this lack of subversive power, at the same time as it suggests the banality of everyday existence for someone with advanced AIDS; filming these patients would sensationalise and dehumanise them.

The themes of subversion and voyeurism with regards to the ill body, find a counterpart in ideas explored by Elizabeth Maynard in an article on artist Feliz Gonzalez-Torres’ candy spills. Gonzalez-Torres created exhibits out of piles of candies which constituted a certain weight; as Maynard describes, some of these could relate to the ideal healthy weight of one or two adult men, representing his partner or himself and his partner. From these, audiences were then invited to take a piece or more if they wished, thus destabilising the ideal weight, and representing the loss of body and life through AIDS. As Maynard notes (122, footnote 3), although a popular and important interpretation, Gonzalez-Torres’ candy spills may be

understood in other contexts as well; in the context of AIDS, however, they offer a subversive portrayal in contrast, she argues, to other less successful works. Maynard references a point made by Douglas Crimp,

Douglas Crimp discusses the complexities of representing PWAs in his chapter, "Portraits of People with AIDS", citing Rosalind Solomon's "Portraits in the Time of AIDS". [...] While visibility is crucial in building AIDS awareness, part of the problem with these portraits is that, in Crimp's words, "the best they can do is elicit pity, and pity is not solidarity." (Crimp 2002, 100). Such portraits were critically acclaimed for their power to reveal the pain (both physical and social) of the illness, but they nonetheless generate and propagate an image of the Othered sick body.

(Ibid. 123)

Crimp, in the aforementioned study, also criticises works for their invasion and exploitation of private lives, "The portrayal of these people's personal circumstances never includes the articulation of the public dimension of the crisis, the social conditions that made AIDS a crisis and continue to perpetuate it as a crisis. People with AIDS are kept safely within the boundaries of their private tragedies" (Crimp, 120). In contrast:

the candy spills do not just invite, but necessitate the viewer's participation and in doing so create a communal experience that accomplishes what Sontag suggests as a way to counter the conservative moralising of the epidemic: 'Making AIDS everyone's problem and therefore a subject on which everyone needs to be educated.'

(Maynard 124-125)

Guibert's own works do not involve participation in the same sense; as they are in a different medium they are arguably not really able to do so in the same way. However, the works make the reader aware of the writing process, and *Le Protocole compassionnel* shows that Guibert is aware of the readership gained from *À l'ami* (PC 195-196), and contains instances of direct address to it (PC 123, 141)<sup>10</sup>; his texts are not merely passive portraits taken by another party to portray an object of pity.

Another aspect that Maynard appreciates is the fun and sensual nature of the candy spills:

Though the works are easily understood as metaphors of loss, the delightful nature of the work, both in its gifting capacity and the near-universally appealing nature of

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<sup>10</sup> Sometimes rhetorical or reflective questions in both texts (AMI 177 PC 77) could be seen as addressing the audience to an extent, but I wanted to cite the ones that explicitly address the reader.

candy, speaks to a *joie de vivre-life* being a vital component of the phrase [...] As the ultimate destination of the candy may very well be the spectator's mouth, Gonzalez-Torres refuses to desexualise the infected body.

(Maynard, 132)

This sensual image brings to mind the passage in *Le Protocole compassionnel* in which Guibert brings together his body and that of the dead dancer, whose DDI he is consuming. "J'avais le même goût que lui dans la bouche, je reproduisais ses grimaces" (PC 23). The mouth is a sensual and even sexual space in which a union of bodies is forged, here through the consumption of DDI. Through the shared taste, Guibert body takes on that of the dancer, mimicking his expressions. The image is both positive and negative, as, although two strangers are united with poignant intimacy, one of these men is only able to live due to the death and permanent absence of the other. This death will be Guibert's fate too, but in the meantime he is able to have this union with the dancer, or indeed a form a Communion, where he takes what was destined to be part of one body into his own, and is thus able to live and write again, and to write about the dancer's death if not his own. This mixture of positive and negative connotations can additionally be found in Jules' description of the dancer: "Il avait un corps splendide, avec un cul insensé, et il n'en restait plus rien." (25). As with the candy spills, sexuality is present in the presentation of the dancer's once admired body, but it also demonstrates the loss of those features caused by AIDS. On one level, "rien" indicates the lack of muscle on his body, but implicit too is the fate of death that renders his body into nothing. This is emphasised when Guibert then juxtaposes his and the dancer's emaciated forms, with the cremated ashes of the dancer: "ce 'rien' de chair qui restait tout de même au danseur, comme il m'en reste à moi un tout petit brin, était déjà pulvérisé en cendres." (25). There is an echo of "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust", a relation between life and death further made complex firstly, through the fact of his already diminishing body which underscores the image of returning to 'nothing', and secondly, through the association one might make between the ashes of the dancer, and the DDI powder which makes up Guibert's "breuvage infecte, avec des grumeaux blancs amers" (23). Guibert, like the audience of Gonzalez-Torres'

candy spills could be said to be consuming another's body, hence making it part of his own and recognising the significance of another's AIDS and death. All of this is viewed within a cycle of life and death; the dancer's death sustains him, but his fate is one Guibert may share. Throughout, Guibert is able to humanise the dancer beyond his status as a dead victim of AIDS, and to celebrate his "corps splendide" without pity.

As regards his own body, we have seen earlier that Guibert presents at times a negative image of his 'skeletal' body and that of others. There are, however, certain subversions of his horror. The first is found in *À l'ami* which is less burdened with references to a body wasting away, but in which nevertheless the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS has altered his perception of himself. Catching himself by chance in the mirror of the doctor's office he describes the realisation he felt: "je me suis trouvé extraordinairement beau, alors que je n'y voyais plus qu'un squelette depuis des mois. [...] il aurait fallu que je m'habitue à ce visage décharné [...] et il aurait fallu, comble ou interruption du narcissisme, que je réussisse à l'aimer." (AMI 259). The reflexive "je me suis trouvé" battles against the impersonal "un squelette" and "ce visage", as Guibert records the point where he recognised the need to accept this body which is now his own. The clause "comble ou interruption du narcissisme" suggests that to do so is not necessarily to work against narcissism; he will not be loving his body in spite of its AIDS, but will love his body as it is, which now includes AIDS, which is not separate from him.

His discomfort with his body returns in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, where, as already stated, there is a greater visible weakening of his body. There is, however, a similar moment of revelation, which involves two main occurrences: one is a girl on the bus telling him he is beautiful, and the other his initial incomprehension at Jules' admiration of a photograph of the artist Robert Mapplethorpe which had horrified Guibert due to the wasting away of Mapplethorpe's body through AIDS (PC 134-135). Guibert draws these two instances together: "Quand la jeune fille de l'autobus m'a vu, je n'étais pas très loin de cet état de décrépitude. Mais elle me disait avec cœur et sincérité que j'étais beau, cela me réchauffait, me faisait comprendre la réaction de Jules et me réconciliait avec cette horrible photo" (135).

Whereas this photograph may have previously held for him the same position as the “scandale inintéressant” (55) he balked from filming, the girl speaking to him with sincerity alters his view of it. Beauty found without pity in the body with AIDS is a subversion not because the AIDS body is horrific, but because it is done with sincerity that is far from the pity that Crimp described. It accepts the reality of the body without the addition of social signifiers which judge or fear it. Guibert may not be able to control the perceptions of others who see his body, but he can be empowered in his own view of it and so see it as less of a spectacle for others. This determines his presentation of it in his writing, where he can at least assert some control over the image that he presents to the reader. As with the presentation of the dancer’s body, writing is able to go beyond the initial shock of a visibly ill or dying body, to present it as belonging to an individual; it is through this individualisation that the image of the body in the text can move away from generalities and thus from fear, revulsion or pity.

## **ii). Exposure**

Before Guibert’s body is subject to the weight loss and frailty that indicate his illness, Guibert still feels exposed. Near the beginning of *À l’ami*, Guibert wonders “Est-ce que ça se voit dans les yeux?” and carries this image of exposure into a description of his blood: “découvert, mis à nu, [...] dénudé et exposé” (AMI 14). Whilst this can be seen to refer to the vulnerability of his blood cells following the infection of HIV, the image of nakedness can be extended to a broader fear of his seropositivity being visible or known. The image of being uncovered is reflected again in the scene where he recognises on the street Ranieri, another seropositive patient at the clinic he attends in Italy: “nous sommes virtuellement démasqués et dénoncés, [...] un petit signe de plus se tatoue sur nos fronts” (253). On the one hand, one senses the power either one has to expose the other, by making their status public. On the other hand, the mere recognition of one of the men reflects back to the other his own AIDS, and makes one feel vulnerable in the significance of this recognition. The imagined power play in this passage might thus be less about others finding out one has AIDS, than it is about the reassertion of AIDS’ power over the body through the physical reminder of its presence, anthropomorphised



through somebody else. Alongside all of this, is the more general sense of being made ‘other’ and set apart from others, as the branding of the imagined tattoo suggests.

This sense of being other is illustrated in an earlier scene which makes this separation literal. On a train in Lisbon, Guibert observes how passengers seem to be avoiding sitting next to him, moving to sit next to Jules instead; the passengers’ reluctance is developed in the text to a point of absurdity, with a conditional tense conjuring up a rejection en masse : “les gens auraient préféré s’empiler sur les têtes les uns des autres plutôt que de prendre une place à l’aise à côté de ce type spécial” (222). It is not made clear precisely why they are choosing to avoid him, although the possible subtextual link to AIDS is not exactly hidden, particularly when Guibert notes how he does not want to give Jules away as his “complice” (222); as well as the undercover, criminal connotations of the term, which, in this context of social judgement and rejection, fits a public perception of those with AIDS, the term also recalls Muzil’s assertion that the threat of HIV created “nouvelles complicités” (30). The fact that Jules is also seropositive and that at this stage Guibert is not as obviously ill as he will be later on in either text, means that the significance of the scene has to be drawn in its potential symbolic nature; that is, because there is no obvious explanation for the passengers decisions, the meaning develops from Guibert’s paranoia at being exposed, and from his awareness of his seropositivity, which marks him out from others, and which, at times alienates him too from Jules. Guibert is isolated in this scene, and, as with the symbolic tattoo, he feels exposed or made other without anyone having discovered his secrets.

To counter his paranoia, however, there are ways in which Guibert can control exposure. The idea of not wanting to be seen and of refusing to be seen by his parents is one that appears in both texts. In *À l’ami* Guibert states his intention of dying “à l’abri du regard de mes parents” (AMI 16) an idea he later repeats to Chandi (161); as Guibert and his text draw nearer to death, this desire becomes more urgent, breaking through in the form of a harsh direct address:

Ma mère m’a pleurniché dans l’oreille ce matin, je l’ai rabrouée. Elle devait sentir ma mort venir, elle a craqué. Non, mes chers parents, vous ne récupérerez ni mon corps malade ni mon cadavre, ni mon fric. Je ne viendrai pas mourir dans vos bras comme

vous l'espérez en disant : « Papa – Maman – je vous aime. » Je vous aime certainement, mais vous m'énerviez. Je veux crever tranquille, sans votre hystérie et sans la mienne, celle que vous déclenchez en moi. Vous apprendrez ma mort dans un journal.

(PC 63)

By the time of the writing of *Le Protocole compassionnel* Guibert has already written a text (presumably away from his parents) where he exhibits his own AIDS, but as he approaches death he feels a need to repeat and assert control, with the text acting as a sort of will or testament. The reference to the newspaper highlights that he is not hiding from his parents out of a sense of shame; he does not want his death to go unreported, but wants their discovery of it to be as impersonal as possible. Addressing them in his text adds a similar layer of impersonality, both because his parents would need to read the text to access this statement (this is not a 'face to face' discussion during which they would be able to repudiate), and because they have been transformed into an object of the text under Guibert's control. His refusal to grant them access not just to his corpse, but to his ill body and his money remind us of the realities of illness and death; from the reliance on others which could effectively force PWAs to go 'home' to their parents due to the debility of late-stage AIDS, to the legalities of who gets a say over what happens to someone's body and assets after death. David Caron notes the particularly homophobic dimension of a parent's legal right to appropriate their child's entire existence during the AIDS crisis: "It is tempting to forget how parents who had once expelled their faggot son now rushed to his bedside to keep the lovers and friends away, to contest the will, and to snatch the spoils of a life lived far from the tender bosom of the family." (Caron, 2014, 10). Guibert does not present his familial situation in this light, but to return to the parental home would still be to relinquish power to their authority, however well-meaning it might be. In the same manner that AIDS can bring back to Guibert his "bras d'enfant" (AMI 284), it risks imprisoning Guibert in the role of child for perpetuity, as, dying before them, he will symbolically remain 'their child', rather than an independent being. This passage is therefore an assertion of his own independence, even if Guibert's power is only illusory. After all, these statements are contained within the text, with no guarantee that his

parents will read them, and regardless of their potential to upset, they are not performative utterances; although he may take measures to ensure a death of his choice through suicide, or to channel his money to other loved ones through his marriage to Berthe, he has limited control over what precisely happens after his death. His text is perhaps the only area he can exert at least the appearance of control, and therefore this may more readily be read as a reassurance to himself that he will not reach the stage where he will need to be looked after by his parents; it is a desire for autonomy until the end which he attempts to materialise through writing.

A more effective method of controlling one's exposure, however, can be seen in the images he can record of himself. As with his horror at Mapplethorpe's picture, Guibert initially recoils from the idea of Jules photographing his body ("mon squelette" (PC 31)). He states that "maintenant il n'y avait plus que de la pitié, une très grande compassion pour ce corps ruiné, qu'il fallait préserver des regards" (31) echoing Crimp's criticism of images eliciting pity. However, when given a camera by a television producer he talks about how, having not signed anything yet, the footage belongs to him: "je suis libre de tout détruire, de tout effacer, tout ça m'appartient" (115). In addition to this, he also has the ability to stage scenes, as he then does for instance when he sets up a camera to film his massage. He acknowledges the artificial nature of the endeavour when he talks about needing to act as though the camera is not there: "il ne faut pas oublier la camera...mais il faut jouer à l'oublier." (116). He is author of the image or the spectacle of his body. It should be noted, however, that Guibert does not necessarily refuse all images of which he is not the creator. During his stay in Elba, where his wellbeing had a largely positive impact on his attitudes towards and ability to confront AIDS and death, he does in fact consent to another friend, Gustave, photographing him (142). In the same way that the comments of the girl on the bus offered him a new perspective on his own and Mapplethorpe's bodies, Guibert's relationship to the image of his body is dependent on other contextual factors; the matter is more complex than a simple delineation of 'good' and 'bad' portrayals.

Nevertheless, making one's own body a spectacle, on one's own terms, can be a subversion of the spectacle that AIDS, and society's attitudes and reactions to it, make of one's body. Murray Pratt demonstrated this in an essay on a striking image taken from the hospital diary *Cytomégalo virus*, where Guibert imagines using the day leave that the hospital has granted him to go for 'a walk along the motorway'. The line is an ironic joke at the fact that the location of the hospital means he has a lack of options to do anything useful with the leave he is given, but, as Pratt argues, the image has an undeniably subversive power:

Guibert's suggested performance would mean taking AIDS and illness out of the hospital ward and confronting mile upon mile of bumper-to-bumper traffic with an image rich in resistant, transformative potential. The skeletal body that Guibert himself confronts in *To the Friend* and that he consents to film in *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur* (but that French television flinched from showing until after his death) would present a representation of someone with AIDS, which, far from being constrained by the dominant and prurient discourses discussed earlier, breaks the bounds of the institution by insisting on its visibility, not as obscenity, nor as object of pity, but rather as sheer spectacle of difference.

(Pratt, 160)

"Spectacle of difference" is a neat summary of some the presentations of Guibert's body discussed thus far in this chapter. Guibert offering up his body and trauma in his writing is not without terms and conditions; he is controlling his own narrative, at least to the extent that he can. He cannot control reactions to his body, but he can choose how and when to present it and he can do so outside of the confines of expected institutions and portrayals. The subversion of the motorway parade that Pratt posits does not come from the shock of the body itself, but its seeming displacement; it has taken itself out of the acceptable context of the patient in hospital and made itself conspicuous. It finds its real world example in the delay in broadcasting Guibert's own recordings of his body, which suggests not knowing what to do with this particular perspective on his own condition<sup>11</sup>. The examples of this section show Guibert's fear of being bound into such a role of an ill or dying body, or a "scandale inintéressant" (AMI 55). From his paranoia in *À l'ami*, before any evidence of his seropositive status is visible, to his aggressive rejection, in the text, of his parents, Guibert shows awareness

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<sup>11</sup> See Boulé (1992) for a lengthier discussion on the implications of not broadcasting the film.

of the dominating narrative surrounding illness, which others and pities the individual; he shows too that he is not immune to that thinking, although he tries to assert his refusal to be thus confined. This fear is in contrast to the ways in which elsewhere Guibert presents the pleasure or beauty, without pity, to be found in the body with AIDS: whether his ‘reconciliation’ with Mapplethorpe’s portrait or his incorporation of the dead dancer’s body in the text. But, regardless of his fear or his varying success in subversion, Guibert is still attempting to confront negative images of his body. Before concluding this section, however, it is necessary to touch upon one scene which seems initially troubling in its relationship to exposure and Guibert’s control.

In *Le Protocole compassionnel*, whilst staying in Italy, Guibert sees again the now grown Djanlouka, a boy he used to be obsessed with. One day, he comes to him and expresses a desire to “tout voir”, which Guibert recognises as meaning the “spectacle de mon squelette” (PC 183). Djanlouka then claims he wants to risk death by having sex with Guibert—although it should be noted that Djanlouka wears a condom, which would prevent the risk of infection from rectal fluids, and he neither is he exposed to Guibert’s semen, so the ‘risk of death’, even if that is defined by infection, is negligible. The power relations in this scene are worth examining. On the one hand, Guibert requires Djanlouka to strip as well so that he may view his body in turn, but on the other hand, his position is very much weakened to that of passive object, and this is reflected in the narrative structure when Djanlouka reveals his aim of ‘risking death’.

Soudain Djanlouka me dit qu’il voulait risquer la mort. Il était venu pour cela. Il avait apporté une capote. Les géologues amateurs, qui montent sur la colline pour en faire voler avec un marteau quelques éclats d’hématite, ce minerai noir précieux scintillant de miroitements argentés, pouvaient nous voir, lui dis-je, mais Djanlouka me répondit qu’il s’en foutait, il enfilait déjà la capote sur son membre dressé qu’il branlait en même temps.

(184)

The fronting of “les géologues amateurs” confuses the reader at first glance, being akin to a camera which suddenly cuts to another image, and which then focuses in ever greater detail

on a particular mineral, before pulling back to reveal that it is in fact Guibert and Djanlouka who would instead be the potential object of their gaze. In terms of syntax, it shows that this description forms part of a free direct style of speech in the narrative, which is Guibert's attempt at an excuse; an excuse which is then immediately dismissed, before sex is brought back into the scene with the image of Djanlouka masturbating and asserting his control over proceedings. Guibert reveals a lack of pleasure at the sex between them and his descriptions are quite mechanical rather than being drawn out, which could be suggestive of a numbing assault. At the same time, it is not presented as traumatic in the way that other scenes of trauma are, such as the account of his fibroscopy (66-71), which is in fact the only scene to which Guibert attributes the term of rape (260).

This scene presents a lack of control of the spectacle of his body, and does not as easily fit in with some of the more subversive portrayals of his body and the control that is able to regain over it. At the same time, there is arguably some attempt at this, in the inclusion of Djanlouka's claim that he will not tell anyone (183), a moment similar to that of Jules asking Guibert not to write about the acquisition of the DDI (23)<sup>12</sup>, although this time it is information about Guibert which is at stake. Guibert does not ask for this oath of silence, and yet again, he is the one to break the silence and simultaneously include explicit mention of the promise of secrecy in the text, even if he was not the one to make it. His writing therefore shows that he is not hiding anything, and could also suggest that the stakes of this scene, despite initial appearances, are in fact lower for Guibert than they are for Djanlouka; we might ask if Djanlouka's promise of secrecy is really a cover for his own participation in the scene, which he does not want to be discovered. Guibert attempts to reframe it from his own exposure to Djanlouka's scrutiny and the imagined geologists watching, to one where he exposes Djanlouka's request and desire. Nevertheless, this scene feels largely unresolved; it is shocking in its abruptness, and does not dwell on potential trauma in the way that, for instance, Guibert has previously focused in excessive detail on blood, but nor does it provide a true

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<sup>12</sup> See 'The Unsayable'

subversion of Guibert's status as a body somebody else is acting upon, in the way that his imagined dialogue with Claudette, discussed in the last chapter, redresses the balance of their relationship, at least in writing. Hence, this resides with passages in both texts that show the limits of his authorial control, as we are left with a transcription of an uncontrollable experience that tends towards its immediacy rather than a post-hoc reflection on it. Djanlouka is not an especially domineering figure. Guibert likens Djanlouka observing his body to a child at the zoo (184); when he finishes having sex with Guibert he hastily makes his escape on his motorbike, like an embarrassed child. Yet, even with the caveats to his status in the scene, he still makes Guibert's body into an object for him to consume and manipulate as he likes. This can be contrasted to other passages in which Guibert perceives himself to be under scrutiny, because there is no real attempt to challenge or reflect on his body being a spectacle. Regardless of his success in regaining control over the image of his body, which varies throughout the texts, Guibert generally makes an effort to confront the sense of his exposure to the gaze of others, or to reframe the spectacle by placing his body front and centre on his own terms. In this respect, this scene can feel like a muted lapse, even if, more generally, it reflects a wider pattern of Guibert's shifting attitudes to his body.

### **iii). The medical gaze**

HIV/AIDS makes the body into an object of medical institutions and thus of the medical gaze. Before Guibert's own diagnosis in the narrative, *À l'ami* shows the way in which Muzil's body is objectified by his hospitalisation. The books that Stéphane brings for him are confiscated, with a doctor asserting "qu'il fallait uniquement le corps du malade et les instruments pour les soins." (AMI 108), showing that Muzil's identity has been reduced to the object of his body and appropriately reflecting ideas expounded on in Foucault's *Naissance de la Clinique*, that doctors see illnesses and symptoms rather than individuals. Doctors are also shown to exhibit a lack of empathy towards Guibert. Examples of this include an incident in *À l'ami* when he describes being left, exposed, on an examination table (44), and his unsympathetic treatment

by the doctor who carries out his fibroscopy in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, for whom Guibert notes he is simply “un petit pédé infecté de plus” (PC 68); he goes on to describe this doctor’s “physique de sadique de nazi” and how he does not offer Guibert much needed comfort during the procedure (69). The hostility in these descriptions is partly a projection of Guibert’s trauma in that particular instance, and is not necessarily a reflection of the doctor’s actual attitude, but it nevertheless indicates that the lack of individualisation in the medical establishment impacts on a patient’s wellbeing, beyond the state of their physical health; Guibert feels like a victim of his treatment. There are times when this impersonal, indeed clinical, approach is, however, desired; Guibert welcomes his transferal to Claudette from his former doctor, Chandi, with whom his relationship has become much too personal, and who therefore permits Guibert to refuse to be weighed or undergo examinations which distress him (33). In contrast, with Claudette, Guibert says: “j’ai eu comme du plaisir, un plaisir déchirant, à m’abandonner.” (34). Despite the pleasure found, this still recognises the giving over of control that frames the doctor-patient relationship.

Guibert is subject to blood tests, examinations and invasive procedures, such as the fibroscopy. However much treatments may help a patient, they also continuously place them in a submissive, and sometimes traumatic, position to the authority of the doctor. There is often a conflict between the narrative of the patient and that of the doctor: “Stories of illness and treatment emerge in very different contexts, and range from published autobiographies or novels to case notes and therapy sessions.” (Raoul et al., 2007, 4). Another study exploring similar contrasts stresses “the need to distinguish disease, as phenomena seen from the practitioner’s perspective (from the outside), from illness, as phenomena seen from the perspective of the sufferer” (Garro and Mattingly, 2000, 9). In which case, following Hawkins: “the act of telling stories of sickness allows for a reorientation and reformulation of the experience and serves to restore the voice of the patient, which has often been lost through the reductionist biomedical focus on the body and disease.” (Raoul et al., 2007, 126).



In Schehr's analysis of a scene in *À l'ami* wherein Guibert describes how his body rejects the use of a tongue depressor during examinations, he distinguishes between such discourses through the image of different bodily "invasions", and the implications or harm posed by the medical in contrast to the sexual: "whereas a 'straight' man might gag during an act of fellatio, that is no problem for Guibert; a straight man accepts the tongue depressor because, for him, it is not an act of fellatio, and that is precisely why Guibert does gag. It is rape by another discourse; it is another world that invades his own." (Schehr, 1995, 174). It is not the action alone which is harmful to the body (harmful, here, in a symbolic rather than a physical sense), but the signification attached to the action; it is the medical invasion which is rejected. The implications of the tongue depressor are revisited during an examination by Claudette in *Le Protocole compassionnel* when Guibert initially mistakes another medical tool for it (57). As the luminous tool is used to examine his mouth, Guibert frames his tongue in a sexual context, "elle voit ma langue et le dessous de ma langue, elle voit ce qui a embrassé, et ce qui a été réjoui par des sexes d'hommes et des garçons" (57). With this image, only hinted at in *À l'ami* but here made explicit, Guibert is able to subvert the object's medical power, at least as far as the narrative is concerned. For it is in the narrative that Claudette is said to see a tongue which has pleased and been pleased by others, whereas during the examination she is only seeing the tongue as a medical object that she is examining. It is therefore in writing that the subversion of the medical gaze can be achieved. This means that what is mainly being reframed or subverted is in fact the reader's expectations of the body as a medical object, and its related power or autonomy.

One way that this subversion is achieved is through the medical invasion being turned on the reader. The text itself becomes a spectacle, as Guibert details his blood tests, keeps track in the narrative of his T-cell levels, lists, at one point, every potential side-effect of AZT (AMI 240), describes in painstaking detail his fibroscopy (PC 66-71) or alveoli lavage (88-93), and his many various trips to the hospital. Guibert has to endure this constant invasion but he ensures that the reader does not get to see him as a victim to be pitied without having to be

faced with the full extent of the medical procedures he is forced to undergo. This narrative spectacle is not limited to the proliferation of medical detail. The subversion of the medical gaze is bolstered by the images and experiences brought into the text by Guibert's particular perspective, whether through descriptions of sex invading procedures or the abundance of blood.

Caron argues that Guibert "resists victimization by forcing his healthy, heterosexual readers to look through the eyes of someone who is ill, gay, and more." (Caron, 1995, 242). He positions Guibert's writing as purposefully presenting a challenge to the readers, characterised by extremes of visceral images:

The autonomy and cohesion of the healthy and heterosexual readers are threatened by the irruption of not only homosexuality and AIDS, but also pedophilia, murder, vampirism, and cannibalism. [...] Guibert makes it clear that he is not fighting for acceptance and tolerance. If he does gain respect, it shall be on his own terms.

(Ibid. 244)

According to this argument, Guibert's texts take on the view of AIDS as part of the gay body and present what it actually means to be "un petit pédé infecté de plus" (PC 68). Whereas that phrase was dismissive of Guibert's identity and labelled him without going into what it means to be "un pédé" or what it means to be "infecté," Guibert ensures that these labels are explored in spectacular detail in his texts. The medical gaze which recognises symptoms and epidemics needs to be subverted through the personal. The clinical and sterile is countered with excess, as with the image of the motorway walk offered by Pratt in the last section or the confrontational nature of the "own terms" listed by Caron. Such subversions need not be unpalatable. Often, it is Guibert refiguring the body within a context that would limit it that is the most effective; both Pratt's and Caron's arguments present the notion of that which does not belong usurping a (medical) institution. An exploration of his body that extends beyond the boundaries of its function in a medical setting allows for the individualisation of his body, which, at least in the text, means that Guibert's particular identity is ever-present, whatever impersonal or even dehumanising procedure he may be subject to.

The ill body has to be handed over to medicine through examinations, operations and drugs, as well as being potentially subject to anyone's scrutiny once the symptoms of its condition become more visible (as with weight loss caused by AIDS), or even from one's knowledge of Guibert's seropositive diagnosis. Control in the context of the body can refer either to the ability to overcome the physical obstructions to writing that an ill body imposes or one's ability to control how it is perceived. The physical dimension of the text reflects Guibert's changing body, whether becoming inundated with the blood whose make-up and T-cell levels determine his proximity to death, or whether taking on the sensual pleasure lost through a lack of libido. Through writing Guibert is able to bring his body front and centre as well as recapture what is lost. The texts sometimes become confrontational as Guibert contends with the various gazes that confine his body to a particular role, such as that of the medical object or of the suffering victim and voyeuristic target of readers who, as Vincent states "*aiment le malheur des autres*" (PC 123); the two can often be linked. To subvert the passive role to which these gazes confine him, Guibert may heighten visceral imagery to grotesque excess, or juxtapose one context with another, as he does when he introduces sexual imagery into the realm of the examination room. But Guibert's presentation of the body is not just an aggressive defence against being seen. In fact, it does not always manage or seemingly attempt to subvert Guibert's lack of control over his body: his initial reluctance to have his pictures taken stems from a perception of his body as something to be pitied; the scene with Djanlouka leaves us lost. However, Guibert also provides an exploration of the body that originates from appreciation or pleasure, whether found in the body itself or transposed from the body into writing. This leads back to Guibert practising his exercises while he 'writes' in bed. In one sense this is evidence of a weakening body, because he is not able to properly write and his physical activity is confined. Crucially, however, when he does get the chance to write about this scene, the descriptions in the passage are infused with a pleasurable sensuality that sees beauty in the process of his actions, rather than rendering them in the claustrophobic terms of a body shrouded in a mosquito net. It is when such pleasure is evident in Guibert's textual

exploration of the body that he is most able to transcend the boundaries imposed on him by his body and perceptions of it, as his body is transcribed into the very fabric of his texts.

## THE UNSAYABLE

“[L]e sida...aura été pour moi un paradigme dans mon projet du dévoilement de soi et de l'énoncé de l'indicible” (AMI 264). Guibert's description presents his writing project as a pursuit of a revelatory mode of expression, in the sense that he wants to reveal himself and to say what is normally unsaid. 'L'indicible' can suggest both that which is as yet untold and that which is difficult to express, because it is in some way a transgression, either for the individual saying it, or those receiving it. These are barriers which Guibert seeks to overcome and, in his mind, AIDS brings with it an effective framework in which to do so. The invasion of AIDS in Guibert's life alters the context in which the unsayable can be understood. On one level, the discussion of his own illness is potentially shocking, due not only to its terminal nature and its ravaging effects on the body, but also due to the fear and stigma tarnishing perceptions of HIV and AIDS at a time of the AIDS crisis, when not much was known about combatting either. Beyond this, as we shall see in Guibert's texts, the unsayable proliferates as a result of AIDS: the hidden fact of someone's seropositive status, the secrecy surrounding drugs trials or unofficial trading of antiretroviral drugs, the trauma that struggles to be expressed, and, throughout all of this, the omnipresence of death. Guibert's attempt to express the unsayable entails a processing of the issues or repercussions inherent in the specific aspect of the unsayable he is revealing; the unsayable has a certain authority, through what 'should not' be said and what 'cannot' be said. This chapter will look at how Guibert contends with these issues to produce the final product of his texts. As will be shown along the way, his means of expression, primarily the act of writing, further complicates the unsayable through the paradoxes created when he expresses what should not or cannot be said; this brings up the question of the capabilities of form, and how Guibert plays with generic expectations to assert his authorial presence.

### Confession & betrayal

One of the ways in which the unsayable is presented in the texts is through what might be described as pertaining to confession or betrayal. A reader's expectations of autobiographical writing or autofiction will include the expectation of some degree of confession, that is to say, the author is in a position to reveal information known only to them, including their innermost thoughts and secrets (Lejeune, 30). Indeed some categories of self-narrating can be marketed around the idea of an author confessing the shocking, traumatic or taboo: Roger Luckhurst observed in 2008 how "Bestseller lists have been dominated for over a decade by a succession of high-profile trauma memoirs, [...] The success of such books prompts periodic controversies about their authenticity" (119). The pleasure of reading confession can be threatened when truth is problematized, as it is in Guibert's writing.

It is worth comparing Guibert's approach to that presented by Chloë Taylor Merleau on the work of Annie Ernaux. Ernaux and Guibert's works share a largely autofictional mode through which the deeply personal is explored, and display a "nécessité d'écrire" or compulsion to write that will be seen a few more times in this chapter. There is, arguably, a greater centring of the weight of confession in Ernaux work. Merleau argues that Ernaux is drawn repeatedly to the process of confessing, without seeking a particular resolution for it. She compares Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Ernaux in their provision of an abundance of information about their lives, and positions this tendency within Foucault's concept of the Panopticon. "Rousseau imagines himself to be under constant surveillance by the other, such that he must remain 'incessantly beneath his gaze'" (Merleau, 2004, 78); this in turn means that he reveals ever more information to prove the truth of his life as he recounts it. But such divulgements are not necessarily undesired by their confessors. Merleau references too Foucault's work regarding repression: "the confession is a ritual of discourse" for which the speaker performs overcoming a 'hesitation' in order to tell us what they wanted to say all along (Ibid. 82). She references Deleuze's notion that, "we do not repeat, as in the discursive repetition of confession and re-confession, because we are repressed, but repress, or claim that something

is repressed, in order to go on repeating,” (Ibid. 86); the author shows that whilst Ernaux claims various motivations for confession, from purging memories to gaining love from others (Ibid. 66), this process is not used therapeutically in order to ‘move on’ from what is confessed. Instead she returns to it, as if it is the act of confessing that compels her, rather than the content of the confession itself. Guibert’s approach is largely in contrast to the one described here. Any performativity in his own confessions tends more towards the enjoyment of playing with reader’s expectations, rather than an attempt to justify his confession. He does not prostrate himself before a reader’s judgement as Rousseau is seen to do, but often implicitly or explicitly asserts his authority in the information he chooses to reveal.

‘Betrayal’, in this discussion, arises when the author encroaches on somebody else’s life, by revealing information that the party would not have consented to be revealed; it is not a question here of the more general discussion surrounding the morality of fictionalising real life people in a text. Both narratives of *À l’ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel* include instances of potential restrictions on what Guibert can or should say. These include his own guilt, the legal or moral implications of certain revelations, and promises he makes to other characters not to divulge particular information. What we are told in the narrative therefore, shows us that Guibert is confessing, as he is revealing secrets of his own, or those of others; in the latter case, he is potentially betraying somebody else’s trust.

In the two texts, Guibert’s betrayal of others is committed through writing, including in his personal diary. Boulé points out that “for Guibert betrayal by writing or photography is not betrayal” (221). Yet his writing self-reflexively acknowledges the betrayal it performs; Guibert is aware, and crucially, makes the reader aware of, the betrayal of trust or friendship that he is committing through his writing, seen for example through the guilt in his descriptions of Muzil’s hospitalisation (AMI 102-103, 106-107). Further to the issue of Guibert’s need to confess and his betrayal of others, this section will consider how his presentation of this betrayal can play with the reader’s expectations. Truth is sometimes blurred as a result of Guibert’s writing. Each text will be considered individually, since the main point of conflict

with regards to confession and betrayal is quite distinct in each, warranting detailed analysis around the texts' specific issues. The first part will consider Guibert's writing about Michel Foucault's illness and death in *À l'ami*; it will cover the question of betrayal within the text, exemplified by Guibert's conflict about writing about Muzil, as well as the moral conversation external to the text, concerning Guibert's right to tell Foucault's story. The second part, focusing on *Le Protocole compassionnel*, will look at how Guibert plays with the reader's trust in him and in his narrative through the paradox of explicitly flagging up what he should not be saying, as he nevertheless recounts it.

### *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*

Muzil is a prominent figure in *À l'ami*. Guibert writes about his friendship with Muzil, which is to be expected of a text concerning Guibert's life and relationships, but he also writes about the more personal aspects of Muzil's life, such as his writing and struggles with celebrity (26), his sex life (28-30), ill health, hospitalisation and death (98-116). It is mainly the inclusion of explicit confirmation of Muzil's AIDS-related death in the text which incited a negative reaction from some, as we will see later on in this discussion.

The text's status as autofiction means that the moral issue of writing about 'Muzil's' (recognisable as Foucault's) illness and death, arises due to the fact that the text is often perceived as a work of autobiography. A work that can be classed as autofiction can be constructed with varying degrees of fictionalisation, and one often requires paratextual information if one wishes to determine the veracity of events described. As far as *À l'ami* is concerned, Guibert states, on the one hand, the fictional aspect of his work: "Muzil, Marine et les autres sont quand même des personnages, ils ne sont pas tout à fait ce qu'ils sont en réalité. Même celui qui est Hervé Guibert dans le livre est un personnage." (Boulé, 2001, 533). On the other hand, he discusses events in the text as events of his life; for instance, on *Apostrophes* Guibert made it explicit that 'Muzil' refers to Foucault, even if only a version of him. For this reason, it is possible for an audience to judge the book based on its ostensible biographical content, rather than looking at the inclusion of such details in the context of a literary text; it



becomes little more than an exposé of the details of Foucault's death, and thus garners controversy. The fact that Foucault was (and is) such a celebrated figure, makes Guibert's text appear even more transgressive, because of Foucault's status.

We can see this when, as part of the panel on *Apostrophes*, Guibert is questioned by host Bernard Pivot on his right to have written about Foucault, who references too that this was a question much discussed in the press. Guibert responds to this questioning on a number of fronts. He is not desperate to defend himself, stating that he does not know whether or not he had the right, and that: "cette mort, cette agonie n'appartient à personne—ne m'appartient pas" (*Apostrophes*, 1990). This could suggest that, even his position as a close, grieving, friend of Foucault's or as a fellow seropositive patient who, as he later states, glimpsed his own future in that death, does not single him out as an arbiter on what can be written about Foucault, but, accordingly, does not give anyone else that right. He goes on to admit that, whilst he wrote about his experience of Foucault's dying in his diary as a means of purging himself, he wondered if this was "une acte de trahison" (Ibid.), knowing that Foucault would be angry or pained if he knew about it. In this, we might recognise the 'hesitation' which justifies a confession, although this concern is mostly relegated to the past, and specifically, to Guibert's initial act of writing in his diary; he does not perform this hesitation in regards to revealing the scene to readers. He describes here what he also described in *À l'ami*, which is the moment of 'revelation' he had about writing in his diary: "je me suis dit: en fait, je suis habilité complètement d'écrire ça, parce qu'en fait c'est mon propre destin" (Ibid.). Although this initially appears as a straightforward justification, he makes the distinction that the revelation is specific to the moment of writing in his diary; it is not a statement of his suitability to write about Foucault in *À l'ami*, but a realisation that he had when writing in his diary and which he then went on to recount in his text. In doing so, he revealed the full truth of his experience, which included his original doubt and guilt. When discussing the scene in *À l'ami* wherein he washes his lips after kissing Muzil's hand (AMI 106), a terrible thing to write according to the host Bernard Pivot, Guibert says "la vérité a une vertu" (*Apostrophes*, 1990); the desire to

represent truth in his work comes closest to a justification of what Guibert writes, although it is not an equivocal defence against moral objections.

Guibert also notes the press' hypocrisy in criticising him whilst simultaneously speculating on and writing about Foucault's death, as well as in seeking opinions on what was written in the book from those who had not read it. The implication in both cases is that the press is fuelling the controversy not out of genuine investment in the question of an individual's privacy, but out of its self-interest in publishing sensational stories; it is able to simultaneously publish details on Foucault's death and criticise someone writing about the same issue. Guibert's appearance on *Apostrophes* provides another opportunity for an audience, many of whom will not have read his book, to externalise the discussion from the specific context of the book and turn it into a generalised moral debate about who is permitted to write about certain topics. The figure of Foucault looms up again, however. Guibert is not just writing about his friend; he is writing about Foucault. With that comes a multitude of expectations about the correct way to write about him, especially due to his philosophical work and the threat the biographer wields of misrepresenting his ideas as well as his life. It is a question David Halperin contends with, adding to the mix the fact of Foucault's homosexuality, and thus:

[T]he special threat that biographical description may represent to those relatively disempowered individuals who are already subject to the process of normalization-by-description [...] The struggle for interpretative authority and for control of representation, intrinsic as it may be to the biographical subject in general, acquires an absolutely irreducible political specificity when it is waged over a gay life.

(Halperin, 1995, 136)

It is not that Foucault being gay or having AIDS are themselves unsayable, but, that, due to the fact that they are already stigmatised, they may be repurposed for the biographer's reductive worldview, as Halperin's analysis of different biographies goes on to show. More specific to Foucault, the biographer's practice of finding the "truth" of the subject is itself counter to the ideas put forth in his academic work (Ibid. 145). Guibert's own text displays no pretension of having mastered who Foucault is, but, since he does write about him, it is a

debate not wholly irrelevant to Guibert's text. One cannot dismiss the moral debate as simply hypocritical, because Guibert does adopt a position of power over the late Foucault in his ability to write about him. However, it is also true to say that the focus of *À l'ami* is much more insular, and much more personal to Guibert than the criticisms of the press might have one believe. As such, it is necessary to examine what Guibert actually wrote, in order to gain a fuller picture of the question of betrayal in *À l'ami*.

The passages in *À l'ami* in which Guibert expresses guilt towards Muzil have already been referenced in the discussion of *Apostrophes*; here, the focus will be solely on what is written in the text itself, to consider how 'betrayal' is presented to the reader, without the external discussion of what should or should not be written. As previously alluded to, his diary is the locus of Guibert's conception of his betrayal. It is the act of writing which arouses these feelings. He expresses the conflict caused when he writes up in full detail his visit to Muzil in the hospital: "Cette activité journalière me soulageait et me dégoûtait, je savais que Muzil aurait eu tant de peine s'il avait su que je rapportais tout cela comme un espion, comme un adversaire," (AMI 103). Guibert paints his actions as a breach of Muzil's privacy; diary passages become intelligence reports through his use of "espion" and "adversaire", terms which position Guibert as an enemy uncaring of Muzil's wellbeing. According to his guilt, if writing in his diary brings Guibert some comfort, he is benefitting, as an adversary would, from Muzil's pain, even as that same activity distresses him in equal measure. The tension evident in the juxtaposition between "soulageait" and "dégoûtait" is similar to the tension we will see in other aspects of the unsayable in his texts, where his need for catharsis through recounting an experience pushes up against a restriction. However, the restriction here arises as a response to something he is already undertaking; it is not a case of Guibert hesitating to write, but rather, it is the process of writing it down which then makes what he has written 'unsayable', due to his subsequent guilt.

In part, his guilt concerns his diary as a record of Muzil's life. "[M]on journal, qui était peut-être destiné, c'était ça le plus abominable, à lui survivre," (103) encompasses the power of a

written text to immortalise an individual even after their death, and therefore to convey parts of their lives they may not have wanted to be known, and to alter others' perceptions of them. Even if no one else reads Guibert's diary, it contains a version of Muzil that is out of the latter's control. He is taking ownership of Muzil's suffering. Beyond Guibert's guilt, the notion of his diary account surviving Muzil also conveys an acknowledgement of Muzil's likely death: Guibert's guilt may, in the first instance, be viewed as an extension of his (impending) grief or his fear of death; in addition to this, the awareness of mortality heightens the sense of betrayal, as it emphasises the powerlessness of Muzil's position in contrast to the degree of control that Guibert is afforded through his writing. It is perhaps death which is "le plus abominable". Guibert does not directly face Muzil's death, as he frames this clause around his writing; he is saying that it is the journal that will ("peut-être") survive Muzil, and not that Muzil will die. Even with this indirect admission, he still postpones "à lui survivre" to the end of the sentence, and hedges with "peut-être", as if holding death at a distance. A double reading can be applied here. The Guibert who is writing in his diary and feeling guilty may sense that Muzil's death is imminent, but does not know when or how it will happen; avoiding a direct statement could reflect Guibert's denial that the death will even happen. But, whilst he is describing past emotions, Guibert is writing this text after Muzil's death; as such, the very same clause can take on the denial of grief, or his inability to face Muzil's death after it has happened. He is writing about his past guilt, knowing that his journal has indeed outlasted Muzil, and that the text we are reading will outlast him too, and so that guilt can be examined in this new context. The question this provokes is whether this sense of guilt persists for Guibert, and, if it does, the reasons for which he continues to write (with a view to publication) about Muzil's hospitalisation.

In order to answer this, we must first return to the subsequent scene of the kiss, mentioned earlier, which addresses the same themes of guilt and fear of death. When Guibert washes his lips, he parallels this action to the washing out his mouth after being kissed by a stripper in Mexico: "En rentrant chez moi, je savonnai ces lèvres, avec honte et soulagement, comme si

elles avaient été contaminées, comme je les avais savonnées dans ma chambre d'hôtel de la rue Edgar-Allan-Poe, après que la vieille putain m'eut fourré sa langue au fond de la gorge.” (106). His fear of contamination is made explicit (“comme si elles avaient été contaminées”), and placing in apposition the actions he paralleled in his hotel room acts as an amplification both of the visceral disgust he felt, and of his shame at viewing Muzil as an infected body, and moreover, at viewing it in the same breath as that of the thus described “vieille putain [qui] m'eut fourré sa langue au fond de la gorge.” That the image of a sexualised invasion of his body is counter to Muzil's passive position as the receiver of Guibert's kiss makes for a queasy juxtaposition, as the ill or dying body is seen as an aggressor by its very existence. Guibert, as he is described in the text, does not know that Muzil has AIDS, but, once more, the reader is aware that the narrator (and author) Guibert does; this knowledge colours this imagery an especially vivid hue. His paranoia in the scene is similar to misinformed fears about the contraction of HIV; hence, one can specify further, the *seropositive* body is seen as an aggressor by its very existence. Similarly, Guibert's palpable fear of a death sentence, made even more apparent at the end of the section through his premonition of his and Muzil's “sort thanatologique commun” (107), can be viewed alongside the knowledge he now has. Hence, the passage involves Guibert facing Muzil's impending death, at the same time as the Guibert who is narrating faces Muzil's AIDS-related death in the context of his own diagnosis and thus likely death from AIDS.

Before he reaches this conclusion of his and Muzil's shared fate, he delves deeper into his feelings of shame and betrayal. Within this passage, cognates of “honte et soulagement” are repeated; this is also an echo of “me soulageait et me dégoutait” (103), which represented his conflicted feelings in the previous passage. He first describes washing his lips, “je savonnai ces lèvres, avec honte et soulagement,” before indicating that the act of writing exacerbates these feelings: “Et j'étais tellement honteux et soulagé que je pris mon journal pour l'écrire [...] Mais je me retrouvais encore plus honteux et soulagé une fois que ce sale geste fut écrit. De quel droit écrivais-je tout cela ?” (106). Up until this point in the passage, it was Guibert's

fear and disgust which seemed to form the basis of his feelings of betrayal towards Muzil, but now it is once again the act of writing in his diary which is framed as the greatest act of betrayal. This is perhaps due to the fact that, even if he is writing about his own shame filled action, he is still writing about Muzil, and thus irrevocably linking him to it, preserving the image of the dying body which provoked such a reaction. In the midst of his distress, Guibert describes being struck by the aforementioned vision, through which he realises that he is also writing his own future agony, and that he and Muzil are connected in this. The sense of death looming which instigated his actions and subsequent shame is thus furthermore his justification for writing. The guilt he felt about taking ownership of Muzil's suffering is tempered by the sense that he shares or will share in that suffering; Muzil's death is his own. As noted in the discussion of *Apostrophes*, the vision or premonition appears to him during this specific act of writing in his diary; whilst it may indicate a shift in his attitude, since his writing about Muzil takes on the aspect of his own death, when it comes to writing this text, Guibert keeps in the guilt and conflict he felt, presenting these feelings alongside the then 'unsayable' things he wrote which instigated them.

It is worth exploring how the issue of the shared fate of AIDS in the text can complicate Guibert's position when it comes to whose experience he writes about. On the one hand, even the spectre of AIDS shifts the context in which the characters understand their lives: early on in the text, Muzil comments how "Cette menace qui flotte a créé de nouvelles complicités, de nouvelles tendresses, de nouvelles solidarités." (30), offering a positive slant on the question of what it means to be part of a community, and what unites individuals; shortly after Muzil's death and the knowledge of its cause, Guibert remarks to one of his friends: "On va tous crever de cette maladie, moi, toi, Jules, tous ceux que nous aimons." (123). It follows that Guibert is writing from within a context of collective trauma; at a time when AIDS was considered a death sentence, one's trauma was not confined to one's own status, but included the many deaths of others, friends or strangers. Thus if Guibert seeks to convey the full truth about 'his' AIDS, it will necessarily involve writing about the suffering around him. On the other hand,

a character's seropositive status can simultaneously unite and isolate them from others in the same position. Jules dubs the unit created by the suspected seropositivity shared by himself, Berthe, their children and Guibert, "le Club des 5" (163), the French translation of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*. This nickname encapsulates both dread and solidarity. The use of a children's book series jars with the implications of seropositivity, that is, illness and death, and furthermore highlights the adults' fears about the children having HIV. Despite its darkly ironic tone, the camaraderie implicated in "le Club des 5" is not erased; the name reflects some of the tenderness discussed in the previous chapter, which saw Guibert describe their group as "un corps unique absolument solidaire" (213). There is a sense of deep solidarity. This does not eliminate clashes. For instance, Guibert describes the tension that surfaces between him and Jules during their trip to Lisbon (180-181). The intimacy which makes of them one body means that they each feel the other's seropositivity and fate alongside their own, which can become unbearable: "Deux sidas c'était trop pour un seul homme" (180). Shared seropositivity can bring with it fear for another person's life as well as a symbolic reinscription of one's own illness, as one is brought back to the concept Guibert earlier named as "un sort thanatologique commun".

In some cases, the knowledge of someone's seropositive status can be perceived as a threat. When in Rome and attending the Spallanzani clinic for his treatments, Guibert becomes familiar with another patient, the 'junkie' Ranieri. Although the two of them never have a conversation, they recognise in each other their shared fate, an experience which Guibert recounts in Section 83, when they spot each other in the street, outside of the context of the treatment centre. "Dès que nous détectons la présence de l'autre, quelque chose en nous s'effondre, nous sommes virtuellement démasqués et dénoncés, nous sommes le poison qui se cache dans la foule, un petit signe de plus se tatoue sur nos fronts." (253). The presence of the other makes more pronounced their own seropositivity, and the threat they can both wield or be victim to, of revealing this status to others. The last chapter addressed the lexical field of exposure in this passage. To this can be added the scientific nature of "détectons la présence":

one detects the presence of a virus, which, in a sense, is what is happening here. Ranieri and Guibert each personify HIV for the other, and they are also able to see in each other what others cannot; without acknowledging the presence of the other, they, and their seropositivity, could have passed unnoticed, (“le poison qui se cache”). When Guibert attempts to speak to him, Ranieri orders his silence with a subtle gesture which Guibert nevertheless perceives as “bien plus violent qu’un coup de poing ou un crachat” (254). Through their seropositivity they are at once joined together and isolated by a pact of silence; breaking that silence would destabilise that dynamic, forcing a more open acknowledgement of their own seropositivity. “[M]ais j’ai un avantage sur lui, il ne connaît pas mon nom” (253): Ranieri may force him to confront AIDS and he may have the power to reveal Guibert’s status, if he were thus inclined, but Guibert’s knowledge and thus power is ultimately greater than that of Ranieri’s over him; this is further emphasised by the fact that it is Guibert’s account we are reading. Although the text also reveals, and in more detail, Guibert’s own AIDS, he is in control of the narrative, and through making Ranieri and others into characters, he is, to a certain extent, in control of them too, in his ability to frame and stage different scenes in the text.

This relates to the issues touched on when Guibert was writing about Muzil in his diary, and whether we can say that, in writing, betrayal comes down to the balance of control which Guibert gains at the expense of others; perhaps, as he initially thought, Guibert is Muzil’s adversary, and that of anyone else he writes about. Unlike Muzil, Ranieri is a stranger to Guibert, and one to whom he made no promise to maintain an oath of silence; unlike Muzil, he is not a recognisable figure in France. What the Ranieri example shows us, however, is that, to a large extent, the unsayable, and that which led to controversy surrounding *À l’ami*, is the stigma of AIDS. That is to say, that, rather than Guibert’s writing being a personal attack on Muzil, it is a betrayal of the image of Foucault, which is tarnished by an association with AIDS. Guibert’s claim that Muzil’s family wanted to strike his cause of death from his medical record (115), could be used to fuel the argument that writing about Muzil’s dying is an invasion of his privacy and in opposition to his family’s wishes. One might, however, question



the need to completely eliminate the cause of his death; Muzil's death becomes unspeakable even for an official document. Guibert's writing, in revealing what is unsayable (Muzil's cause of death) as well as the methods which keep it unsaid (such as the medical record) is an antidote to the societal, homophobic taboo that seeks to obscure the reality of AIDS.

It becomes difficult to separate the question of betrayal in *À l'ami* from the broader context of controversy which includes the shame and stigma surrounding AIDS and from a discussion which only views Muzil as his real life counterpart. A possible distinction could be made between the betrayal of writing and the betrayal of publishing (i.e. making the writing public) about Muzil; the former is dealt with in the text and the latter is part of a debate external to the book. Conclusions to this external debate are difficult to reach, relying as they do on an individual's conception of what is permissible to make public about someone, as well as the period in which the debate takes place. Shifts in knowledge about and attitudes towards AIDS, as well as the difference between the tabloid shock of contemporary revelations about the death of a recently deceased well-known figure, and the established biographical detail of his death many years later, mean that the moral outrage about Guibert's 'betrayal' does not necessarily persist in the same way. As far as the text is concerned, however, the betrayal of Muzil is constant. It exists because Guibert felt it through his writing and presented that experience of conflicted emotions to the reader; although he then goes on to process his guilt, again through the act of writing, this remains underpinned by the sense of betrayal he once felt, which is immortalised in his text.

#### *Le Protocole compassionnel*

Whereas the aspect of confession and betrayal in *À l'ami* raises the question of Guibert's trustworthiness as a person, owing to the reader's knowledge of Muzil/Foucault, its impact in *Le Protocole compassionnel* is much less public; the effects of confession and betrayal relate more to the reading experience, and the trustworthiness appraised is that of Guibert as narrator.

The text begins with a confession that Jules has brought Guibert illegally obtained doses of the antiretroviral drug DDI. Recounted in a single sentence, the opening passage (PC 11-14) describes the extent of the deterioration of Guibert's condition, glancing over some of the key ideas which will be explored throughout the book, of his despair ("à bout de forces physiques et morales"), his embodiment of old age ("un corps de vieillard avait pris possession de mon corps d'homme de trente-cinq ans"), his loss of sexuality or libido ("je ne baise plus, je n'ai plus aucune idée sexuelle, je ne me branle plus,"), his relationship to writing ("je n'écrivais plus jusqu'à ce jour"), and death and suicide ("les deux petits flacons de Digitaline"). This spurt of writing can be considered as a blurting of his confession, and the repetition of the same scene of Jules depositing the DDI at the foot of his bed at four a.m. at different points in the text (11, 20, 22, 110) emphasises this need to reveal the truth.

The second mention of Jules bringing the DDI, forming part of a more detailed account of the incident, occurs on page 20. Before analysing this scene, however, it is worth pausing on the section of text which precedes it, and thus separates it from the opening scene, in order to understand the context in which the arrival of the DDI is to be understood. It is a passage (15-19) which focuses on the extent of Guibert's physical frailty, wherein he twice references Auschwitz in relation to his body (18-19); the section ends: "parfois j'ai l'impression qu'il va en sortir puisque des gens sont bien revenus d'Auschwitz, d'autres fois il est clair qu'il est condamné, en route vers la tombe, inéluctablement." (19). "Il" refers to the figure he sees each morning in the mirror; the third person pronoun alienates Guibert from his body and holds at a distance its trauma, even as he employs the image of the Holocaust, which evokes the notion of mortality and the body brutalised to an extreme point: death or the closest point to it. Sarkonak's analysis of this scene points out that "Guibert does not compare himself to someone who died in a death camp; rather he compares himself to a potential Holocaust survivor" (183), explicitly contrasting his interpretation with Schehr's description of "the seeming inexorability of the death sentence." (Ibid. quoting Schehr, 1995, 175). Whilst I appreciate Sarkonak's distinction, which shows that the image of Auschwitz is not

synonymous with an individual's death itself, Auschwitz does, however, evoke a broader framework of death, or extremity, in which Guibert now survives. His continued survival is currently a state of daily 'dying' as opposed to living, a loss (of muscle mass, faculties, and hope), proceeding to a point of oblivion. Any sense of hope of a future survival which sees a reversal of this process is still not enough to eliminate the context he inhabits, just as the description of those coming back from Auschwitz links them to what they have survived.

This is what precedes the arrival of the DDI. The reader is made aware of the extent of Guibert's worsening condition and therefore the significance of his access, through whatever means, to this new drug. DDI is not presented as a miracle cure, evidenced later on by Guibert commenting on the contradictory information available on the product (PC 22); but, in a similar way to what the image of Auschwitz survivors suggests, it is the hope in a hopeless situation, which may allow him to survive for a bit longer, even if it does not eliminate the horror or trauma of his circumstances, or even if it brings its own side-effects. Related to this, this section of the text illustrates the extreme nature of Guibert's situation. Regardless of the drug's potential to help him, it is the fact that he feels that he has no choice but to take it which marks out a new phase of his life; the text suggests that it is a phase that is marked by death, from which his continued survival and hope of future survival are never far removed. Boulé too notes how the deterioration of Guibert's body alters the context of his writing between *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*:

If finding out that one is HIV positive has been perceived as a way of carrying on inscribing the work within the project of unveiling the self and of 'tout dire' ('saying everything') through the *I* that tells lies, the progress of the disease threatens the existence of the writer Hervé Guibert's non-fictional self, and literature from now on can only have a survival role and, at a pinch, of familiarisation with death.

(Boulé, 1999, 214)

If Guibert writes about his life, it follows that he will write about the DDI, since this significantly shapes this phase of his life. Since the DDI is obtained illegally, the passages describing his deterioration then, might, in the first instance, function as a justification for this. Although Guibert does not demonstrate any particular sense of guilt about breaking the law,

these passages nevertheless suggest to the reader that Guibert's situation, and perhaps by extension that of other contemporary PWAs, necessitates survival by any means possible. The DDI, then, corresponds to the extremity framing his life and writing. It is this extremity which might also explain Guibert's willingness to write about the DDI, despite its illicit acquisition; in a similar fashion, Guibert is overcoming the limits of what he can or cannot write.

Writing about the DDI, however, goes beyond flouting the restrictions of the law; he is also betraying the trust of his friend. Guibert's confession of the DDI presents a paradox. As he places the DDI on his bed, Jules asks him to swear not to tell anyone how he obtained it (PC 20); a few pages later, this is backed up by a threat to kill him should he ever write about it. The sentence follows thus: "[Jules] m'a dit le lendemain qu'il me tuerait si j'écrivais un jour cette histoire, ce que j'ai entrepris justement avant-hier, grâce à l'illusion de l'amélioration que sembler me procurer le médicament" (23). The reader is confronted with several contradictions. To start with, Guibert is writing about Jules telling him not to tell anyone. Even if breaking a promise is in service of revealing the truth to the reader and the friends he has lied to, and even if the only way the reader knows that he has done so because he tells us, the act of betrayal itself could mark Guibert and by extension the narrative as potentially untrustworthy. If we follow from White's argument that "[t]he contemporary autobiographical novel enjoys the prestige of confession and the freedom of fiction," (White, 1995) this is perhaps not particularly shocking; Guibert can take advantage of his text's generic ambiguity to protect anyone involved if needed, by embellishing or changing details. Furthermore, by writing about his life under the title of fiction, he has already set up tension between truth and fiction, into which the paradox of his DDI confession neatly fits. The explicit threat of death associated specifically with the writing down of this story, and its juxtaposition with the clause "ce que j'ai enterpris justement avant-hier", is a lot more brazen. Guibert takes an obstacle to his writing to an extreme point, testing the boundaries of what the reader can believe, and then humorously frames it with a flippant disregard for the threat that should have ensured that either what he is writing should not exist, or that the author himself, if we believe him to be

the same as the narrator, should no longer be alive. Michael Riffaterre argues that, in fiction, it is not recourse to 'real life' that makes a text believable, but in fact, an opposite move towards fictionality. Discussing elements which flag up the fictional nature of a text and label it as made-up, he states "[Signs of fictionality] point to a truth invulnerable to the deficiencies of mimesis or to the reader's resistance to it. They do so by suspending disbelief, by radically displacing verisimilitude." (Riffaterre, 1990, 33). It is true that Guibert's statements need not 'harm' the reader's belief in the narrative, replacing as they do 'real life' with a new (fictional) logic, that the reader accepts as part of the text's reality. However, neither *À l'ami* nor *Le Protocole compassionnel* will be exclusively read as fiction. Even without knowing anything about Guibert's life, or having watched interviews where he talks about events of the books as of his own life (see *Apostrophes*, 1990; *Ex-Libris*, 1991), the corresponding names of author and protagonist might prime the reader for at least a semi-autobiographical reading, and truth in autobiography is different to Riffaterre's "fictional truth". Lejeune suggests that readers are often on the lookout for breaches in the contract a text has established. That is, they may seek out any inaccuracies or lies in autobiographies, or look for similarities between the author's life and the protagonist of a novel (Lejeune, 1975, 30). Guibert's mixing of genres can create a duality of reception; even if the reader 'accepts' Guibert cheating death as a reality of the text, they may, conscious of the slippery nature of autofiction, simultaneously label this as part of his fictionalisation. If autofiction is expected to wrong-foot, the reader delights in such perversions, even more so because Guibert frames his statement humorously, practically winking through the text. We trust that he is playing with us.

At this point, it is also worth examining how the threat or inevitability of death impacts this structure of confession and betrayal. When Jules gives Guibert the DDI he tells him "Il faut que tu commence à le prendre dès demain matin...tu n'a plus le choix", referencing the state of his health (PC 22). Following from this, we can say that Guibert has swapped the threat of death from AIDS with the threat of death from Jules: he will die if he does not take the DDI, and, if we were to take Jules' threat literally, he will die if he does takes the DDI but betrays

the secret. The scenario Guibert constructs is one where the parameters of survival are made up of deception: whether illegal obtainment or hiding the truth from others, friends or even readers. Even this may not be enough. The omnipresence of death still looms alongside hope for survival, and the uncertainty caused by living with AIDS can be seen with the phrase “l’illusion de l’amélioration” (23) from the quotation discussed earlier: even as the hope that the DDI provides spurs Guibert on to write, he is conscious that the drug may prove ineffective; the mix of secrets and betrayal is suited to his unsettled existence in which even recovery may be an illusion. Analogous to this is the more general situation of persons with AIDS of the time. Black market solutions, patients lying to official channels, and, conversely, the obfuscation of drugs manufacturers or bureaucracies, are all referenced in the text. Examples include when Guibert gives his remaining AZT to the doctor Nacier (100), who is seropositive and receives treatment for it under a different name at the hospital where he works, or when Guibert describes contradictory information surrounding AIDS and drugs trials, obtained through official or unofficial channels:

...le sida est pris dans une chaîne de mensonges. Par exemple, pour l’expérimentation de la substance immunogène de Melvil Mockney : au congrès de San Francisco, on a exposé les premiers résultats en disant que le vaccin avait été testé sur des chimpanzés, puis sur quelque soixante personnes, depuis un an, alors que je sais que ce produit a été injectée depuis trois années...

(101)

In the context of even official lies and misinformation, it is not surprising that an individual with HIV or AIDS attempting to navigate their survival ends up relying on unofficial networks. Thus far, Guibert has been forthright about his own acquisition of DDI and has demonstrated his text’s potential for duplicity with the implications of Jules’ threat. Currently flying under the radar, however, is the reference in the above passage to Melvil Mockney. We know from *À l’ami*, that Guibert was privy to the inner dealings of the manufacture and development of Mockney’s vaccine, and so his reference lends credibility to his argument: he has first-hand experience of the unreliability of official versions of events. What the reader may not realise is that the reference to Mockney anticipates the revelation later on in the text, that Guibert did in fact receive the vaccine he was denied in *À l’ami*. A retrospective reading

of this passage therefore confirms the ‘chain of lies’ of its thesis, through the text’s own demonstration of truth obscured, or at least, delayed.

We now move on to ‘truth’ as concerns narrative depiction. As previously referenced, the action of Jules placing the DDI on Guibert’s bed is repeated several times in the text. In terms of the narrative, the repetition of the scene signals to the reader its importance. Rather than being a single, completed event, it is the start of a particular phase of Guibert’s life, one of taking DDI and what hope or effect that might have, and is thus a moment whose reach affects everything that follows; having the text return to this moment, and consider it from different angles is a reflection of this significance.

One area that could be considered is Guibert’s constant awareness of life and death as someone with AIDS, and on how seemingly small a moment the stakes of survival or death can hang. The acquisition of the DDI is furthermore emotionally charged, dependent as it is on the death of another man, meaning that, once again, Guibert’s continued survival is framed in close proximity to death. Repetition of a particular moment can also illustrate the reconstruction of memory, particularly in terms of how truth is constructed in a narrative. If we look at pages 20, 22 and 110 in the text, some variation of Jules placing the DDI at the foot of Guibert’s bed at four a.m. is followed by something Jules supposedly said, respectively: “Tu me jures de ne jamais dire comment tu l’as obtenu,”; “Il faut que tu commence à le prendre dès demain matin...tu n’a plus le choix”; “Il y en a pour trois semaines.”. The “truth” of the scene, that is, the entirety of ‘what actually happened’, is presented to the reader in fragments; rather than providing one straight transcription of everything Jules said to him that morning, Guibert fashions his narrative around the significant phrase. The first example of what Jules says, as examined earlier, forms part of the conflict between Guibert’s need to confess and his requirement to remain silent; the second, in the same passage, presents a turning point between life and death; the third appears much later in the text, when Guibert’s supply of DDI is running low. Going back and adding detail to the scene as and when it is relevant to his life, demonstrates the active nature of memory and how connections can be formed with the past

and possess a different significance for someone in different contexts. In this way, the repetition of elements of a particular scene keeps the reader close to Guibert's thoughts and feelings. It also shows the constructed nature of the narrative; Guibert is in control of the time and manner in which information is revealed.

Whilst this control applies to all scenes in the book, since Guibert is the author, it is in the passages where he draws attention to lying or omissions that his ability to manipulate the text and, by extension, the truth and his readers, becomes most apparent. So far we have focused on the account of his acquisition of the DDI in our examination of how Guibert problematizes truth and the reader's trust in him; now we turn to another confession, which more directly implicates the reader and how Guibert omits or conceals information from them.

If, in the passages concerning his acquisition of the DDI, Guibert establishes himself as a duplicitous figure, whose confession the reader can nevertheless trust, the revelation of the hitherto hidden fact that he had received Mockney's injection in January 1990 (186), further complicates his position. In *À l'ami* this is the ostensible miracle cure Guibert is promised then denied by his friend Bill, leaving Guibert hopeless at the end of the text. Central to the narrative and emotional force of *À l'ami*, its position here as one of a number of failed attempts to treat or cure his AIDS shifts the context in which the reader now understands both texts. With regards to *À l'ami*, whilst the revelation in *Le Protocole compassionnel* does not lessen the impact of Bill's betrayal, its initial omission seems somewhat jarring. It is a development about which the reader of *À l'ami* would presumably be keen to find out, but it is now being shown as one of a number of medical treatments, without the frame of urgency surrounding the vaccine as it does in *À l'ami*. Guibert has moved on; there is no miracle cure.

As for the reader's understanding of *Le Protocole compassionnel*, there are two things we may note. Firstly, whilst the vaccine is no longer seen as Guibert's salvation, the narrative marks his receiving of the vaccine as significant; he presents it as a confession and insists on its inclusion in his text: "Mais je ne peux plus davantage faire l'impasse sur ce récit." (186). Secondly, Guibert is once again playing with the reader's expectations of truth and betrayal.



Unlike a narrative which opens with a confession, as *Le Protocole compassionnel* does with the introduction of the DDI, one which offers up a confession at a much later point can cast doubt on the preceding narrative, and reminds the reader of the presence of a narrator who may not always be reliable. Confession as the impetus for a narrative suggests to the reader that they will be given the ‘full story’, as one is initiated into a secret; any breach in trust or betrayal comes at the expense of other characters, for instance Jules, rather than that of the reader. In contrast, the delayed confession arrives at the expense of the reader who has, to a certain extent, been lied to up to that point. If we look at the account itself, Guibert’s delayed confession may seem understandable, at least initially. Guibert claims this confession comes after much deliberation, since he was sworn to secrecy. However, Boulé reminds us that “for Guibert betrayal by writing or photography is not betrayal” and suggests that the description of the friend who enabled him to receive the vaccine as “personnage admirable” is part of the process of fictionalisation (Boulé, 1999, 221); Guibert is not betraying a real person, but a character. Furthermore, the reader, familiar with this scenario from the confession about the DDI, might question what differentiates the secrecy surrounding the two; why is the revelation of the vaccine ostensibly hedged, and that of the DDI flippant, and, if both Jules and the friend become characters who cannot be betrayed outside of the text, why is full anonymity (neither pseudonym nor defining features are given for the friend) only preserved for one of them? Whilst the reader may guess at any number of motivations, a coherent logic will remain out of reach and is largely unnecessary. We might offer that Guibert prioritises what works best for his text; the barefaced betrayal of Jules bolstered the image of Guibert as a narrator able to do as he pleases, whereas in this instance, the identity of his friend is subordinate to the revelation about the vaccine. What is important is that Guibert is once more toying with expectations, and the reader is once more reminded about the complicated status of truth in the narrative.

The vaccination proves to be another disappointment. As with the Casablanca episode (PC 199-249), it precedes<sup>13</sup> Guibert's use of DDI, and as such forms part of his hopelessness at the start of the text. Guibert receives one shot of the vaccine, which does nothing to stop his plummeting T-cell count, and when he returns for his second dose he finds it has evaporated (187). In addition to the disappointment of an ineffective or absent treatment, which may have led to a reluctance to write about it, Guibert acknowledges that this scenario may seem too fanciful, and so part of writing it includes an acknowledgment of this and a justification that it is in fact true. "Il ne lui arrive que des choses fausses" (188), the concluding sentence of this section, is as much a justification for the slippery nature of truth in his writing as it is for this specific event. It is said by Muzil of Guibert's books, though it is recounted to Guibert by Stéphane. Used in this context, it suggests that the unbelievable and contradictory are part of the truth of Guibert's experience, but, as already noted, the statement refers to Guibert's books, and is therefore tied to his writing rather than to his life. That is to say, it provides no more assurance to the reader that unbelievable things happen to Guibert, but only shows that unbelievable things happen to Guibert in his writing; it is a confirmation of what the narrative has already shown us, that the truth is always muddled. Guibert knows the full truth of any particular life event, and in writing it he selects what he tells the reader, what he omits, and even what he tells the reader he should have omitted. Through the latter, he demonstrates his control as the writer of this text through his ability to manipulate the truth of a scene. This control is not absolute. He can manipulate and postpone events in his writing, but he cannot change what happened in reality. The examples that fall under the category of confession and betrayal often relate to great uncertainty and instability in his life. In order to survive, Guibert takes his chances on unreliable solutions: the single dose of the vaccine he was able to receive did not save him, and even if the DDI proves effective, it will eventually run out. Bringing the trustworthiness of the text or himself into question is suited to the uncertainty dominating his

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<sup>13</sup> If we use *Le Mausolée des amants* as a guide for a timeline of events, the first and second doses of the vaccine are recounted on pp.509 and 520, his visit to Casablanca on p.516, and T.'s obtainment of the DDI on p.526

life; if Guibert does not know where he stands with regards to the DDI for example, there is no reason the reader should either. Unlike the anguish that tinged at least his initial writing about Muzil in *À l'ami*, in *Le Protocole compassionnel* confession and betrayal are more brazen. Guibert wields the information he reveals in a manner that glances against the boundaries of what is unsayable; the manner in which Guibert writes about that which initially appears unsayable due to the secrecy surrounding it means that he can develop this theme further, by presenting that which is 'unsayable' because it seems to subvert expectations of truth and thus complicates the status of the text.

### Trauma

In literature, trauma can be unsayable either because it is shocking or taboo, hence unsayable in the eyes of a reader, or because it is painful to recount, hence unsayable for the narrator, who may or may not be the author. Trauma permeates *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*: individual traumatic events, such as Muzil's death or the first fibroscopy, exist alongside the omnipresence of AIDS, and the subsequent progressive loss of physical faculties and threat of death which dominate Guibert's everyday life. As this thesis' concern is writing and control, the specific focus here will be on the relationship between Guibert's trauma and the act of writing; this includes the process by which he tries to express trauma and how trauma can influence the process. The two categories which will be looked at in this section are, firstly, the conflict of feeling unable, but needing to, express or write one's trauma, and, secondly, building on that, the ways in which Guibert attempts to communicate that something is unsayable.

With regards to the first category, the initial question we might consider is the status of both texts for Guibert. Near the beginning of *À l'ami*, the book is able fulfil the role of companion, when he wishes to isolate himself from others during the first few months following his diagnosis (AMI 10-12); the book is not a consolation, rather he actively turns to it against

seeking comfort or understanding from friends who attempt to reach out to him and whom he rejects (12). On *Apostrophes*, Guibert details how he wrote in his diary in order to forget. A similar function can be applied to the writing in his texts; when Guibert finds that his urge to recount to Jules his distressing hospital visits conflicts with his desire not to hurt him, he asks: “N’est-ce pas justement ici que je dois le faire? Que je peux le faire?” (PC 46), indicating the text. Writing is presented as an outlet for expressing what cannot be vocalised in other contexts. It had already taken on this role in *À l’ami*, wherein expressing Berthe’s, and consequently her children’s, likely contraction of HIV becomes taboo. Of one interaction with Berthe, Guibert writes: “chacun savait que l’autre savait mais nous n’en parlions pas.” (AMI 163); again, it is through writing that Guibert can break this pact of silence. In both instances, there is a sense that expressing the ‘unsayable’ is harmful. In the example from *À l’ami*, the implication is that acknowledgement, official or otherwise, will lend authority to the virus, an idea Guibert explicitly states in the text: “dire qu’on est malade ne faisait qu’accréditer la maladie, elle devenait réelle tout à coup,” (AMI 175). In *Le Protocole compassionnel*, referring to his reluctance to have Jules accompany him during his hospital visits, Guibert observes that: “je lui cache les horreurs que je vois et en même temps j’ai besoin de les lui raconter, ce qui est peut-être pis pour lui.” (PC 46): Guibert does not develop the reason it might be worse for Jules to be told about, rather than to witness a distressing event, but through this statement he is able to present the idea that the account of a traumatic event can itself carry a significant traumatic weight, for the recipient as well as the speaker or writer of the account. Hawkins asks of trauma writing “is the primary motive self-healing? Or do these narratives serve as a kind of witness, testifying to the reality of the experience and all the feelings that went with it?” (114). Guibert’s need to tell Jules, even the need to write his experiences, could fit Hawkins’ notion of trauma writing as “testimony”; it is a way to acknowledge the ‘unspeakable’ that is inflicted on him.

Whilst the above examples present writing as an alternative means of expressing trauma, this does not mean that writing is invariably less painful than speaking. Before looking at how the

narrative demonstrates this, this section turns to what we know of Guibert's construction of his texts, with reference to particularly traumatic passages. Of the composition of *Le Protocole compassionnel*, Boulé writes: "the episodes of the cellar, the two fibroscopies and the alveoli lavage, which follow each other in the text, were only written when the book was finished and then joined together. According to Guibert, recounting these episodes was very painful." (Boulé, 1999, 211); he contrasts this process with the fact that Guibert's diary is often the basis for the majority of the writing that becomes his published texts. Boulé is quoting from an interview with Guibert, which affords him an insight into the pasted together structure of the text resulting from the trauma of revisiting certain memories, but even for a reader who is not aware of Guibert's methods, the succession of these traumatic episodes feels somewhat separate to the rest of the narrative, similar to the Casablanca episode. Neither the narrative of *À l'ami* nor that of *Le Protocole compassionnel* follows a strictly chronological structure, but the grouping together of these traumatic scenes makes for a particularly jumbled timeline: the narrative progresses from the first fibroscopy (66-71) to, five months later, the second (72-77), then back in time to the day after the first fibroscopy when Guibert ends up trapped in his cellar (78-87), to, finally, the unspecified date of the alveoli lavage (88-93), which we only know occurs sometime after the first fibroscopy. Rather than progress chronologically, the narrative logic of this grouping seems more thematic. Four fairly separate anecdotes, which share a traumatic basis, are linked together in the narrative through reference to the first fibroscopy in the opening line of each section: "La seconde fibroscopie, exactement cinq mois plus tard," (72); "le lendemain de la première fibroscopie, je me laissai enfermer dans ma cave." (78); "Le lavage alvéolaire, contrairement à la première fibroscopie cauchemardesque," (88). The first fibroscopy, as will be examined in more detail later, remains one of the most significant traumatic events for Guibert in the text, and the narrative recalling of it in these passages is in keeping with the conflict between the need versus the struggle to write one's trauma.

If the process of writing scenes long after they occurred and without recourse to his journal marks a departure for Guibert, it is perhaps worth taking a moment to consider the use of his diary in constructing his texts. Reading what has been published of Guibert's diaries, one often finds sentences or passages that are directly lifted and used in *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*. This thesis is not about to delve into a painstaking study of the development of the texts based on an exhaustive list of passages that are lifted or reworked from his diary. For the average reader, it is not obvious whether something is extracted from his diary, nor would such knowledge necessarily elevate one's understanding or enjoyment of the text. In some cases however, reference to his diary can raise compelling questions about the role of the writing process. The passage that will be examined is taken from Section 52 of *À l'ami*, in which Guibert is describing the effects of his and Jules' HIV diagnoses on their relationship to one another, including on their sex life. The following quoted extracts are, respectively from his diary and from the text:

...planté au fond de mon cul, il me fit jouir en me regardant dans les yeux, c'est un regard trop sublime, trop déchirant, à la fois éternel et menacé par l'éternité, je bloque mon sanglot dans ma gorge en le faisant passer pour un soupir de détente.

(MAU 447)

Planté au fond de mon cul dans la chair qui enrobait l'os du bassin, Jules me fit jouir en me regardant dans les yeux. C'était un regard insoutenable, trop sublime, trop déchirant, à la fois éternel et menacé par l'éternité. Je bloquai mon sanglot dans ma gorge en le faisant passer pour un soupir de détente.

(AMI 166)

A few stylistic changes and the addition of more description mark the development into the extract's final form. There is a shift in tense from present to past historic, which in turn marks a shift to a higher, more literary register. The syntactical and lexical choices reflect this, with the run-on sentence from his diary split into three sentences, and becoming enriched with greater detail, although most of the original phrasing is maintained. The simplistic, fairly crude "planté au fond de mon cul" takes on a more delicate dimension, not only because likening skin to a carefully placed garment is more poetic, but also due to the sensual quality of the chosen lexis: the texture evoked by "la chair qui enrobait" is soft in contrast to the solid bone

it covers. Both focus on closeness of bodies; what separates skin and bone, potentially symbolic stand-ins for life and death, and the intimacy of two bodies whose proximity is measured in relation to the skeleton. This closeness bolsters the description of Jules' gaze as "insoutenable", another addition to *À l'ami*'s version; the intimacy becomes overwhelming. This passage illustrates the writing of the unsayable on a number of levels. As concerns the events of the text, Guibert is confronted with the enormity of AIDS and the implication of death which now frames their sexual acts as an image of "deux squelettes sodomites" (AMI 166); taken with the earlier description of "l'os du bassin", Guibert's focus on the skeleton evokes death, and anticipates their future existence with AIDS, for which the emaciated body is a common association. This is all too much to bear and he feels the need to hide or silence his reaction, so that it remains unsaid to Jules. The narrator, who earlier in this section tells us that he is currently writing this (165), is able to express what was previously unsaid. At the same time, since this has largely been taken verbatim from his diary, we might consider how Guibert, in copying from his diary, is at once writing and not writing. That is to say, that whilst he is writing his text, he is not simply revisiting a memory, but taking what he already wrote and transferring it into a different context; he is a conduit for his initial expression of the unsayable. He certainly transforms this expression into a piece of literature, but he is still building on an existing utterance, rather than fully reconstructing the painful moment. This is a small detail, and it would only gain greater significance if Guibert was frequently transplanting larger sections of his diary into the text, in order to avoid revisiting memories, but nevertheless, because the extract is about the unsayable, the context of its production helps to highlight the tension between saying and not saying. Finally, if we consider the diary alone, then the moment described, his sob, is one that Guibert hid from T., for whom Jules is a fictionalised counterpart. Whereas *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel*, which this thesis has previously likened to diaries, make the unsayable public, the original context of this passage is literally Guibert's personal diary. This suggests, in theory, that it once fulfilled the function of acting as the companion which spared others from his trauma, achieving plainly what published texts only achieve in paradox: at once expressing and keeping the unsayable

hidden. All is not that straightforward as far as Guibert is concerned however, and, since the diary contains occasional references to T. reading it, and even specifically looking for his own name among its pages (MAU, 76, 93), the aborted sob of the unsayable moment may or may not have reached T. even before its adaptation in *À l'ami*. For Guibert, it seems that the unsayable will, in whatever way, eventually be expressed.

After that contextual detour, it is time to return to the texts to explore more closely instances where Guibert struggles to directly reference his situation. The opening sentence of *À l'ami* is a striking example of this. “J’ai eu le sida pendant trois mois.” (AMI 9) conveys the tension of Guibert needing to write about his diagnosis but being unable to scale the enormity of it; it expresses a tension too between acceptance of and resistance to this fate. The statement is at once a proclamation and a fictionalisation. Guibert does not, at this point, shy away from the word “sida” and the reader knows that it is impossible to speak of having *had* AIDS, when it is incurable, so they are able to extrapolate the meaning of this statement and the subtext of Guibert’s fear or trauma. The use of the perfect tense structure blunts the admission, however, and the remainder of the passage plays with uncertainty and wrong-foots the reader, such as in the second and third sentences which switch Guibert’s HIV status back and forth between positive and negative: “J’ai eu le sida pendant trois mois. Plus exactement j’ai cru pendant trois mois que j’étais condamné par cette maladie mortelle qu’on appelle le sida. Or je ne me faisais pas d’idées, j’étais réellement atteint,” (9); the reader goes on to discover that the reason he is not ‘condemned’ by AIDS is because he believes he will be cured, but the initial interpretation of that line could suggest that he was mistaken in his diagnosis, as the clarification in the third sentence acknowledges. The potential cure is similarly packaged in uncertainty. In “Mais, au bout de trois mois, un hasard extraordinaire me fit croire et me donna quasiment l’assurance que je pourrais échapper à cette maladie”, the phrase “me fit croire” echoes the earlier use of “j’ai cru” and therefore its confused subjectivity; the modifier “quasiment” likewise conveys a degree of doubt. Guibert likens the promise of the cure with the initial discovery of his seropositivity, because in both cases, he has only confided in a



small number of people; the cure itself becomes somewhat unsayable, although in this case, this reticence conveys the fragility of Guibert's hope. Although the hope of a cure remains part of the plot of the text, Guibert does not frame AIDS in the same manner as in the opening passage. In fact, the reader often contends with a barrage of medical jargon detailing examinations, the use and side-effects of antiretroviral drugs, and the progression of his own illness, including updates on his T-cell count. This overload of information can, to some extent, adopt the same function of prevaricating or avoiding stating a fact, because it suggests the desire to control a situation; whilst not saying something protects one from dealing with an issue, recounting it in painstaking detail shows an attempt to master one's circumstances, at least to the extent of having a comprehensive understanding of them.

When it becomes apparent that Guibert will have to begin taking AZT, a drug he has already spoken about in the text, but the administration of which only begins in the terminal stage of AIDS (211-212), he states: "Mais ni lui [le docteur Chandi] ni moi, alors, ne fûmes plus capables de prononcer le nom de ce médicament." (212). Just as AZT, in signalling death, strikes Guibert dumb, so too, early on in the narrative of *Le Protocole compassionnel* when Guibert's medication (the AZT) seems ineffectual in halting the continued progression of his illness, Guibert employs the term "la maladie" instead of "sida", to which he parenthetically draws the reader's attention "(voyez comme j'ai du mal de nouveau à prononcer le mot)" (PC 22). Later on, Guibert notes "Arrive un moment, est arrivé pour moi en tout cas ce moment, où l'on se fiche complètement de son taux de T4." (189). As AZT, AIDS or his T-cell levels begin to more starkly represent death, they elude his control. As any reader will observe, however, Guibert does not avoid these words or topics for long. Thus, throughout the narratives of both texts, when the omissions do occur, they more prominently signal lapses into despair or hopelessness, with the writer struggling to articulate his situation. Following Guibert's aforementioned parenthetical acknowledgement of his avoidance of "sida", we see that this struggle is brought to the fore, becoming its own theme in his writing.

The seeming impossibility of writing when confronted with death is effectively explored in the passage in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, when Guibert accidentally locks himself in his cellar. This has already been mentioned further up as one of a succession of scenes that Guibert found painful to write, representing as they did particularly traumatic events. At this point, the focus will be on the events of the scene itself, and his inability to write within it. The symbolic relationship between the cellar and AIDS or death is one drawn in the text itself, indeed it is a thought that Guibert attributes to his past self, rather than presenting it as a post hoc reflection: “je me disais je pourrais peut-être tirer un enseignement de cette situation limite et catastrophique de la cave pour cette autre situation, peut-être plus limite encore et plus catastrophique, qu’est le sida.” (85). Although he presents it that way, however, Guibert is still writing this from a distance, and is thus able to refashion the trauma of the scene into an allegory of AIDS and death. This means that we can read the scene both in terms of the panic felt by Guibert in this cellar, and of the writer, free from the cellar, but now using it to reflect on this ‘other situation’ of his AIDS. Confronted with the lack of escape and seeming inevitability of death from his entrapment, Guibert considers using the writing implements on him to write his last words, just as in his daily life he is writing against his encroaching death. Anything he could think to write, however, is either superfluous or overwhelming (83). Death’s apparent proximity furthermore burdens the act of writing with the significance of one’s “final words”, so that Guibert finds: “je voulais me garder des mots définitifs, comme je voulais me garder d’écrire un nouveau livre”(85). In this instance, Guibert turns away from writing to focus on survival; he decides to use the paper he has in his possession in a more practical way, by attempting, in vain, a childhood trick of knocking the key out of the lock and retrieving it on a piece of paper he has pushed underneath to the other side (85-86), symbolically rejecting his role as writer.

If Guibert balks at the thought of writing in this situation, how are we thus to understand writing’s broader role in his continued survival against AIDS? Trapped in his cellar, Guibert alternates between hope and despair, and his postponement of writing his final words is a

denial or refusal of death, however futile his protest may seem against an inevitable end. If Guibert is not found and does die, he has no control over what his final words will actually be, since he will have already written them prior to this incident, but at the same time, accepting the ostensible control that writing them out now could afford him, would actually be to relinquish all control to death. “Peu importe le temps finalement, sinon celui de la résistance, seule compte la délivrance.” (85), or as Guibert says elsewhere in the text “Je lutte. Mon Dieu, que cette lutte est belle.” (175). Writing fulfils this role in other parts of both texts, as even when he recounts his despair or trauma, he is still exerting some control, unlike in the moments of hopelessness when he finds no motivation to write; but here, it is useless. In the cellar, writing itself is linked to Guibert’s mortality and thus forms part of his trauma, rendering him incapable of utilizing it as a tool to process his experience in a controlled form. Guibert can only write up this scene (even if he does struggle to do so) long after the fact, when writing is re-established at a certain distance from the event. Even at this stage, however, the specific trauma of the incident gets processed through an allegorical reflection on the ongoing trauma of AIDS, meaning that his emotions in the scene have not been fully resolved, although he has found a way to express what was unsayable. Traumatic moments find expression in some form, whether Guibert writes instead of speaking them or whether he simply draws attention in the narrative to the fact that he is not saying or writing something. The unsayable becomes a discussed theme, which expresses the tension between needing to write and being unable to; that need is sometimes a need to rid oneself of something traumatic, but it can also be seen as Guibert’s need to say the “indisible” and represent the truth of his experience, however painful the process of writing may itself become.

As we have seen, it is difficult to represent the unsayable outside of the paradox of talking about what you are not saying. This section will consider how Guibert tries to illustrate the ways in which something is unsayable. Style is one way to achieve this, although it is not a straightforward translation of trauma into narrative. The largely non-chronological narrative structures of both texts can convey a sense of reliving certain events, particularly when certain

emotionally charged moments are repeated, such as Muzil collapsing in his kitchen in *À l'ami* (38, 50, 98) or Jules bringing Guibert the DDI in *Le Protocole compassionnel* (11, 20, 22, 110). The postponement of certain scenes, such as Guibert admitting to the reader that he had received Mockney's vaccination, can likewise more readily highlight Guibert's reticence to recount something than it would otherwise, since it has been hitherto 'hidden' from the reader. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to read the narrative structure of the texts simply as "fragmented" (Luckhurst, 2008, 81) trauma writing, although, as mentioned earlier with the succession of traumatic episodes in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, Guibert's writing is not exempt from such interruptions. Rather, this could be seen as part of the project of autofiction, which can cut out all unnecessary detail and play around with structure in order to convey the truth of one's experience (Cusset, 2012, 2). This structure is also complemented by the frequent presence of Guibert the writer; when Guibert references the fact that he is writing the text we are reading, we understand that the coherency of the narrative is to be found in the fact of someone representing the self, thus reconstructing their experience by revisiting certain events in an order that makes sense as he is currently relating to events, instead of it being found in a tightly plotted chronological narrative with a definitive beginning, middle and end.<sup>14</sup> In terms of trauma, this was effectively demonstrated with the passages on the fibroscopies, the cellar and the alveoli lavage, which were collated separately to the rest of the text.

Another stylistic element which facilitates the recounting of a traumatic event, but which is not confined to this purpose, is the lengthy syntax, discussed in previous chapters, and primarily abounding in *À l'ami*. As with the previous stylistic example its use is partly a reflection of Guibert's relationship to his writing, as influenced by the impact of AIDS in his life. Nevertheless, the mass of these sentences can overwhelm the reader, and their greater context often means that their structure conveys a sense of panic, as is the case with the section detailing Guibert's distressing commute to the Claude-Bernhard hospital (AMI 51-60). Such

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<sup>14</sup> See 'Self-conscious writing'

lengthy sentences can be contrasted to the comparatively terse style adopted in the section following Bill's betrayal of Guibert, which recounts a succession of several days in the space of a paragraph (243). Whereas the Bernhard mimicking sentences can imply trauma expressed through the rush of someone purging themselves of a particular event, the narrative summary of several days is suggestive of a period of depression, wherein one struggles to express what is happening to them. What is particularly notable about these structures is the shift in the reader's experience; were all of the text written in the same style, the reader would eventually adjust, and the style would become less obtrusive. The shifts in the style however, ensure that one feels more starkly the writer's presence at times when a sentence stretches over several pages or several days are condensed into half of one. *Le Protocole compassionel*, whose style is more consistent and contains fewer labyrinthine sentences than *À l'ami*, notably opens with a single-sentence passage that bursts forth and presents a need to write that rushes the reader through a summary of the latest progression of his illness up until this point in the narrative, where the introduction of the DDI will take him into a new, unknowable situation, marking a significant shift for Guibert.

Beyond stylistic considerations, there is one more example which will be examined for how Guibert expresses the unsayable: that of the presentation of the first fibroscopy (PC 66-71).

Luckhurst raises a salient point:

The journal form of the text continually belies its own status. After a gruelling description of a fibroscopy, depicted as brutal oral rape, Guibert records: 'When I got home, I opened my journal and wrote "Fibroscopy." Nothing else, nothing more, no explanation, no description of the examination and no commentary on my suffering...I had become incapable of recounting my experience' (Guibert 1993a: 48). This contradicts itself: the trauma of the fibroscopy is at once unrepresentable and exhaustively represented.

(Luckhurst, 2008, 141-142)

His observation touches on the contradictions inherent in the presentation of trauma, and how one can maintain the sense that something is unsayable even as one painstakingly recounts it.

If one turns to Guibert's diaries one finds: "Fibroscopie. Puis emmuré vivant le lendemain dans une cave. Les choses abominables me coupent maintenant le sifflet ; auparavant j'en aurais tartiné des pages." (MAU 512). So we see that Guibert does indeed only write "Fibroscopie." about his procedure, but that this is not the full extent of his expression; he includes a reflection on his inability to write. This is mentioned here, not to prove the 'veracity' of what Guibert wrote, especially because *Le Protocole compassionnel* is a separate text to the diary, and one which is expected to be more fictionalised, but because it provides a parallel to the struggle to write that is presented in the texts. As discussed earlier, the cellar and fibroscopy were episodes that did not grow out of writing from his diary, but were reconstructed separately at a later date. Guibert's inability to write thus formed part of the traumatic experience at the time, and consequently its inclusion in the text allows for a fuller account of his trauma. His inability to write is furthermore notable due to the near omnipresence of writing in Guibert's life; as he notes in the above extract in his diary, this episode would previously have generated page upon page of writing. The fibroscopy and the episode in the cellar demonstrate how the function or purpose of writing can be lost when confronted with trauma. When he is able to write again, he can produce those pages, but this does not negate the interruption that the trauma caused. Following his second fibroscopy, which possesses none of the butchery or anguish of the first, Guibert muses on which of the two fibroscopies would have been the best to film: "Ma souffrance si photogénique, ou son soulagement?" (77). This question acknowledges, and could be seen as a direct address to the reader's voyeurism and the pleasure that can be gained from the representation of that which is shocking or unsayable. Guibert neatly conveys this with the comparison to a horror film, which recognises the entertainment value of the horrific, and the use of "photogénique" which presents the aesthetic attraction of suffering and reduces his trauma down to a single image. Although Guibert has not filmed either fibroscopy, he has written about both, with the reader as his audience. Literature and film are different media, with the ability to expose or censor content for the audience in their own way, and, whilst writing about his experiences after the fact may afford Guibert more control in conveying his own point of view than setting up a

camera to record everything would, the passage of his first fibroscopy is still packed with gruesome detail. The question of which fibroscopy he should have filmed is a question too of which of the written fibroscopy episodes has most captivated the reader and, by extension, interrogates the reader's relationship to the text more generally, and whether they are a voyeur to Guibert's suffering. The expression of the traumatic involves a navigation of the response to the unsayable. Whilst Guibert can be confrontational through direct address, turning the reader's voyeurism into an attack on them, he still cannot necessarily write himself out of the trauma he is subject to.

In both texts, writing is repeatedly made central to the experience of trauma, whether it is shown as the only possible outlet for its full expression in some circumstances, or whether, conversely, its practice is made impossible because of its potential to exacerbate the trauma felt. Guibert furthermore calls our attention to the act of writing: we are not reading a narrative of trauma in which a narrator 'speaks' to the reader of their experiences, and to which the writing process may be a background concern, if not entirely obscured; we are reading a narrative in which the writing up of a specific traumatic incident forms part of the broader experience of trauma. The texts' concern is thus not just the unsayable, but how and why it this eventually said. In the case of writing which presents confession or betrayal, Guibert is asserting his right to reveal what he does; any remorse or doubt felt is itself resolved through the act of writing, as with his 'premonition' of his shared fate with Muzil. In *Le Protocole compassionnel* he even displays pleasure in perverting the nature of truth, since what he describes is shrouded in secrecy, which he delights in uncovering. When writing is initially limited by an incapacitating trauma, Guibert's texts prove successful in giving expression to it, whether through simply managing to recount an event he was unable to prior, stylistic devices which convey his emotions, or using one event to convey a deeper trauma, as with the allegorical transformation of the cellar. Trauma is not however transcended through writing. By its very nature, trauma persists, and the immediacy of both texts, in their proximity to Guibert's experience, mean that the reader is left without a concrete resolution. So whilst

Guibert expertly traverses over the borders of the unsayable, and complicates the status of what cannot be said in a text, he does not always succeed in fully divorcing himself from the aspects that make up the unsayable, which remain beyond his control.



## CONCLUSION

A reader of *À l'ami* and *Le Protocole compassionnel* might notice a certain inconsistency when first approaching either text. At first glance, the timelines seem ordered at random, the style can change from one section to the next, with a short paragraph-long description followed by the labyrinthine chaos of a Bernhardian imitation; and Guibert's mood and motivation to write is determined by the volatile balance of ever-shifting hope and despair. The theme of control emerges from Guibert's attempt to organise and transform his experiences into writing, an attempt whose presence the reader is conscious of throughout both texts. This process is similarly subject to inconsistency. At times the mere ability to write after a period of inactivity can signal stability and empowerment for Guibert, suggesting that writing affords Guibert a degree of control, which is beneficial in the face of the dearth of options he has in terms of his health. At others, his writing seems to be threatened by his seropositivity, through its erosion of his writerly identity, the irruptions of trauma disintegrating the form, and a perceived inability to give meaningful expression to a life, that, in Guibert's moments of hopelessness, is largely defined by deterioration and a looming death. Writing is not the panacea for lack of control when faced with the enormity of death; nor can 'control' be easily measured. It becomes apparent that, if one wishes to examine control, it must be with a view to Guibert's perception of it, and the ways in which he tackles this in his writing, instead of aiming for a clear-cut verdict in terms of whether writing re-establishes a sense of order to Guibert's life.

The first chapter set out to demonstrate how the seeming inconsistency in his texts is representative of the foregrounding of the writing process, as Guibert attempts to turn his life into literature. Closer examination of this process reveals that the texts are a lot more ordered than the sense of immediacy might suggest. For instance, the 'AZT passages' initially seem to randomly break up the early part of *À l'ami*'s narrative through sudden panicked recourse to traumatic events. It becomes clear, however, firstly, that these passages are linked, and

secondly, that their significance is in the delineation of a secondary timeline, representing the time of narrating, which runs parallel to the narrated events of the novel. That is to say, Guibert begins his text on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1988, four days after the blood tests whose results will determine the new course of his life and, within that, his book; Guibert is operating in a transitory period, where his ‘future’, as it will be set out in the verdict of 11<sup>th</sup> January, is fast approaching, and, as such, its relevance takes over his writing sessions. This is part of what I argued is a deliberately structured emotional coherence in the text. Since Guibert’s texts centre the process of writing, these apparent interruptions to the timeline both enable an authentic portrayal of the writing process and establish the emotional undercurrent of the text. This idea was revisited in the third chapter, through narrative repetitions of a particular event, such as the acquisition of DDI, and the grouping of traumatic episodes. We are brought into the present moment of the author looking back on or even currently experiencing events which he attempts to craft into a text.

The centring of the writing process also displays Guibert’s enjoyment of it. Artistic creation is analysed as Guibert narrates the act of writing and revising, or reflects on specific stylistic choices. Writing is his domain, although at times his command of it is threatened, either through illness, loss of writerly identity, or lack of morale. But these experiences can be transformative as well; for example, when Guibert adopts Bernhard’s style, he simultaneously demonstrates his feeling of losing control over his writing, and through so doing, displays his skill in adopting another mode of expression. The notion of pleasure in writing underscored much of the discussion in the second chapter, which considered the ways in which Guibert repurposes into writing the obstacles both created by and facing his changing body. He makes the decision to continue to write in the face of death, and imbues his texts with a physicality that represents the new dimensions of his body. At one end this can entail a re-familiarisation with his body, such as when he is able to re-contextualise the photograph of Mapplethorpe, or when he describes the pleasurable sensations created through his physiotherapy exercises. At the other end, the physical can be transposed into writing, which becomes the case at the

moments when writing seems to be replacing sex. As far as its treatment of the body is concerned, then, writing is successful as an outlet for exploration of physical changes and challenges. Most difficult to scale is the obstacle created by external perception of his body, whether actual or imagined. Guibert senses the potential eyes on him even before his body is more obviously subject to the gazes of the medical establishment, strangers on the street or the readers themselves; in writing he attempts to confront that hypervisibility, often relying on excess in imagery that seeks to challenge the voyeuristic reader. Although he has no final say in how his body will be perceived by others, he is able to problematize the consumption of its image. He does not attempt to hide his body away, but brings his own negative and positive perceptions alike into his texts; he does not believe he has control over his own body at times, but what he manages to present is a personalised view of it, which allows for a nuanced treatment alongside the more standard categorisations of the body with AIDS.

A difficulty when discussing the effect of AIDS on the body, or in any aspect of life, is to avoid entrenching the perception of HIV or AIDS as a separate adversarial entity, that sees the individual afflicted with a curse or relies on the lexis and metaphors of warfare which “contribute to the stigmatizing of certain illnesses and, by extension, of those who are ill.” (Sontag 11). I accept that my own language may play into that idea, although I have attempted to be fair in reflecting firstly, how Guibert himself perceives his seropositivity and secondly, how aspects specific to his condition are affecting him. For the first point, Guibert does rely on imagery of an invading force to describe the progress of the HIV virus and its effects on his body, and he is at times alienated from his own reflection; analysis of such imagery thus cannot be avoided. As concerns the second point, this study has tried to show that, for instance, AIDS causes fatigue and weight loss, which in turn affect Guibert’s day to day life and psychological wellbeing, but that AIDS itself does not strip Guibert of his identity—although, for Guibert, it sometimes feels that way. Guibert also acknowledges that HIV and its development into AIDS becomes part of the reality of his body and of his life, and therefore,

the question of control is one not limited to overcoming obstacles, but also to negotiating what this new reality means for him.

In addition to Guibert's internal guilt, conflict and trauma, part of the third chapter was dedicated to the consideration of aspects external to the texts: the moral debate surrounding what is acceptable or should be censored in writing, and the reader's potential reception of problematic elements of a text. The focus nevertheless remained on issues that Guibert himself touches upon in his texts. There is scope to deepen analysis on questions relating to the genre of autofiction and the morality of presenting real people in a text, which moves beyond the totemic figure of Foucault to consider characters like Bill, or Jules. For this thesis, I wanted to remain close to Guibert's own conflict about writing about Muzil in the text, whilst also acknowledging that, with autofiction, it is not always possible to fully divorce author from narrator, or outside discussions from the content of the text. Similar to this, was the approach to the relationship of trust, explored through Guibert's treatment of confession in *Le Protocole compassionnel*, which relies on an awareness of the reader receiving the 'truth' confessed, in order to play around with it. Guibert has no control over the debate that may continue outside of the text but he asserts his control of what is 'permissible' for him to include in his own narrative, and it is often through writing that he deals with his own internal conflict. We see this with the issue of trauma, to which Guibert is able to give expression through writing, although this does not necessarily achieve catharsis or allow him to move on from it.

This study has been guided by Guibert's signposted struggles with his writing. Much of its focus has been on close reading, and so there is no limit to what could be explored in greater depth or what further connections could be made. What I hope to have done, however, is to flesh out the particularities of the role of writing in Guibert's life. In some respects, writing provides a haven of control against the uncontrollable elements of Guibert's life, whether he uses direct address to challenge the reader, or plays with the form to subvert the nature of truth. But, as Guibert will not be cured, any control gained in the moment comes up against an overriding sense of futility, and will not be sustained. Both texts reflect this tension,

whether with explicit acknowledgment of it in text, or through their narrative structures, which pivot between hope, despair and daily life. The inevitability of his death does not, however, diminish the value of those moments when Guibert is able to break through hopelessness with the aid of the creative process. The writing in which Guibert finds solace or a means of creative expression is an active process; it is when he is constructing his text that his pleasure is most evident. This can leave the reader in limbo, as is the case with the ending of both texts: that of *À l'ami* sees Guibert trapped in his own text, and by the close of *Le Protocole compassionnel* the text straddles literature and film, as Guibert strives towards another form of expression. Clear-cut conclusions are not always reached, but, in a way, this is to be expected from writing which deals with that which is ongoing.

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